Principles and Practice of Prayer

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Table of Contents

What Is Prayer? 5
A. Prayer is an expression of instinctive DESIRE. 5
B. Prayer is the expression of a GOOD desire. 5
C. Prayer is COMMUNION with God. 5
D. Prayer is PETITION. 6
E. Prayer is the expression of creaturely DEPENDENCE. 6
F. Prayer is CONFLICT with Satan. 6
The Bible and Prayer 7
A. The Bible is the BASIS of all prayer. 7
B. The Bible is the DIRECTIVE for prayer. 7
C. The Bible is the CORRECTIVE for prayer. 7
D. The Bible will often be the SUBJECT of prayer. 7
E. The Bible and its messengers will often be the OBJECT of prayer. 7
F. The Bible provides the INSPIRATION for the life of prayer. 8
G. Conclusion. 8
The Theology of Prayer 9
A. The doctrine of God and the practice of prayer. 9
B. Jesus Christ and prayer. 10
C. The Holy Spirit and prayer. 11
The Prayer Life of Jesus 12
A. At His baptism 12
B. Following a very busy day in Capernaum 12
C. While being thronged by the multitudes 12
D. Before choosing the Twelve 13
E. After feeding the 5,000 and facing an old temptation 13
F. At Caesarea Philippi 13
G. At the Transfiguration 13
H. After the return of the Seventy 14
I. When His praying stirred the desire of the disciples 14
J. At the raising of Lazarus 14
K. When some Greek visitors were brought to Him 14
L. His intercession for Peter 14
M. His high priestly prayer 15
N. In the Garden of Gethsemane 15
O. The prayers from the cross 16
The Prayer Life of Jesus ..... **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
The Prayer Teaching of Jesus 18
A. The Sermon on the Mount: concerning our enemies 18
B. The Sermon on the Mount: special instruction in prayer 19
C. The simplicity of prayer 19
D. The pattern for prayer 19
E. The Sermon on the Mount: persistent praying 20
F. The parable of the persistent neighbor 20
G. The parable of the unjust judge 21
H. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican 22
I. Prayer teaching in the Upper Room Discourse: praying in Jesus' name. 23
Intercessory Prayer 25
A. DEFINITION of intercessory prayer. 25

B. EXAMPLES of intercessory prayer. 25
C. OBJECTS for intercessory prayer. 25
D. MOVING MEN through intercessory prayer. 26
E. The REFLEX ACTION of intercessory prayer. 27
The Present Intercession of Christ 29
A. The FACT of Christ's intercession. 29
B. The nature of Christ's intercession IN GENERAL. 29
C. Our Lord's intercession IN PARTICULAR. 29
D. The IMPLICATIONS of Christ's intercession. 30
Praying with Faith 31
A. What is faith? 31
B. Biblical examples. 31
C. A working definition of faith. 31
D. The basis for praying in faith. 31
E. How to pray in faith. 32
Praying in the Spirit 33
A. What is praying "in the Spirit"? 33
B. Some observations concerning prayer "in the Spirit." 33
C. How does the Spirit help us in prayer? 33
Prayer and Fasting 34
A. Some general observations on fasting. 34
B. The spirit and attitude behind any genuine, effective fasting. 34
C. The teaching of Jesus on fasting. 34
D. Fasting in the Book of Acts. 35
E. The value of prayer and fasting. 35
F. Conclusions regarding prayer and fasting. 35
United Prayer 37
A. United prayer in the Scriptures. 37
B. Some guiding principles. 37
C. Some derived truths. 38
D. Some practical applications. 38
Attitudes and Approaches in Prayer 40
A. Sense of duty. 40
B. A sense of privilege. 40
C. Humility. 40
D. Submission. 40
E. Fervency. 40
F. Definiteness. 41
Hindrances to Praying 42
A. Internal hindrances. 42
B. External hindrances. 42
Unanswered Prayer 44
1. We may be asking with wrong motives 44
2. Our faith may be resting on a wrong basis: faith in faith or faith in prayer rather than faith in God 44
3. We may be entertaining a secret sympathy with some sin 44
4. Our confidence may be held back by a condemning heart 44
5. We may be entertaining a bitter or unforgiving spirit 44
6. All may not be right in our marital relationship 44
7. God may be delaying the answer because He has something better for us than what we have asked 44

8. God may be withholding what we ask in order to do special work in us 44
9. We may be praying a foolish prayer. 44
Conflict in Prayer 45
A. Instruction concerning the conflict 45
B. Particulars given for the conflict 45
C. An example of the conflict 46
D. Further glimpses of the conflict. 47
E. Conclusion and application. 47
The Morning Watch (How to Pray an Hour) 49
A. There must be a determination to have such a ministry. 49
B. There must be a time established that will be kept as faithfully as mealtime, bedtime, etc. 49
C. The following simple time schedule may be followed. 49
How to Observe a Day of Prayer and Fasting 51
The Intercessory Missionary 52
Definition 52
Necessity for intercessory foreign missionaries. 52
What can be done by intercessory missionaries? 53
How to Do the Work of an Intercessory Missionary 54
General procedure. 54
Warnings 54
General truths. 54
How to Prepare and Use a Prayer Notebook 56
A. Size. 56
B. Organization. 56
C. Use. 56
Conclusion: Why Pray? 57
A. We must pray because prayer is a vital life sign of the Christian and ought to be natural to him. 57
B. We must pray because the Scripture assumes that the child of God will pray. 57
C. We must pray because Jesus Christ our Lord commanded it 57
D. We must pray because Jesus Christ our Lord taught us how 57
E. We must pray because the Apostle Paul exhorted believers to pray 57
F. We must pray because prayer is God's ordained way of appropriating His own omnipotent resources and getting His work accomplished. 58
G. We must pray because prayer is the highest activity of service that the Christian can render 58

1. What Is Prayer?

It should be remembered that prayer in some form or another is a nearly universal experience. A possible exception: he confirmed academic atheist. The most primitive religions have a form of prayer as a part of their practice; the non-Christian cults include prayer in their systems. Under the umbrella of Christendom, many ideas concerning prayer exist. For some, it is a recitation of religious platitudes or exercises. For others, it is a mysterious technique for extracting benevolences from the Almighty in times of desperate need. It is considered by still others as a psychological exercise restoring poise and peace of mind to troubled souls.

Our study concerns only prayer that is distinctively Christian, prayer that is taught and displayed in the Bible.

A number of different words are used in the New Testament for prayer in its various aspects. Four of the principal words are found together in I Timothy 2:1, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men."

1. Supplication (*deesis, deomai*). Supplication, petition. May be used of a request addressed to God or man.

2. Prayer (proseuche, proseuchomai). A very broad word as far as its content is concerned; limited in its New Testament usage to prayer to God.

3. Intercession (*enteuxis, entugchano*). "Expresses confiding access to God . . . childlike confidence . . . the heart's converse with God" (Thayer). When used in combination with other prayer words this word seems to speak of petition made for others while supplication (deesis) is petition concerning one's own personal need.

4. Giving of thanks (*eucharistia, eucharistos*). The giving of thanks for blessings from God.

There are other expressions—a large number in the Old Testament—that are used for prayer, but these are the principal ones. Many ideas are covered but the chief ones are: 1) a general worship and adoration of God; 2) a petitioning, requesting, supplicating for one's own needs; 3) petitioning on behalf of others; and 4) the giving of thanks in recognition of the benefits and mercies bestowed by God.

A. Prayer is an expression of instinctive DESIRE.

1. Desire is a factor of real life.

2. Animals express their desire for food, companionship, etc.

3. Infants and children voice desires as the earliest sort of human expression.

4. The regenerate soul immediately senses an instinct to pray; "… for, behold, he prayeth" (Acts 9:11).

B. Prayer is the expression of a GOOD desire.

1. It is desire that has to be disciplined. Some prayers in the Bible were granted, some were denied (see Elijah, Jonah, etc.).

2. It is desire that must be shaped by truth—the truth of God's revealed Word.

3. It is God-ward desire. The prayer instinct is universal. Prayer plays a large part in pagan religions. But we are considering prayer that is directed to the true God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ whose Person, work and character are revealed in the Bible.

C. Prayer is COMMUNION with God.

1. This has been denied by some who want to see in prayer nothing but "asking and receiving."

2. There is a natural desire for any being to have communion with its own kind. When one is born into the family of God, he longs for fellowship with the One whose nature and life he shares (see Eph. 3:14,15; Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:4-6).

3. Consider the biblical examples.

4. Many expressions in the Psalms, but see especially Psalm 42:1,2.

5. Jesus spent entire nights in prayer. Example: Luke 6:12-16. Is it conceivable that He spent all those hours asking of the Father?

D. Prayer is PETITION.

1. This is the most commonly recognized fact about prayer. "Take the element of petition out of prayer, and prayer may be wholesome exercise of the soul or a spiritual energy of the life, but it ceases to be what we mean by prayer. Prayer with Jesus was straightforward and unhesitating petition, asking God to do something and believing that He would do it" (Hastings, p. 38).

2. Petition is the most elemental and pervasive aspect of prayer.

a. Elemental. In the childhood of life, petition is as common as breathing, b. Pervasive. As the maturing Christian sees his sinfulness, weakness and dependence, he resorts increasingly to prayer of a petitionary sort.

E. Prayer is the expression of creaturely DEPENDENCE.

1. One of the attributes of real humanity is dependence upon the Creator. The consciousness of redemption from sin intensifies that sense of dependence in the redeemed one. "This consciousness of dependence finds its only full expression in prayer; we lean upon God, and are at rest. It may pour itself forth with a pathos that stirs the heart of sympathy, or despair may muffle 'the groanings which cannot be uttered': in either case the intelligent recognition of creature-helplessness leaning upon the divine power is the kneeling posture of the soul in prayer. It is the thirst of ignorance drinking deep draughts from the overflowing fulness of divine wisdom. It is the exhaustion of weakness drawing nerve into a broken will from the resources of infinite strength. This is prayer: when, sinking through the earthly crust, the creature seeks repose in God; when from the eternal fountain he derives the help and solace which the creature always needs, and which the Creator alone can supply" (Palmer, p. 16).

2. This helps to explain why Jesus prayed. As a real man, He had made Himself dependent upon the Father (Jn. 6:57).

3. This helps to explain why many professing Christians do not pray. They have lost their sense of dependence.

F. Prayer is CONFLICT with Satan.

1. Satan is the relentless foe of God and of the children of God. He will oppose anything that enhances the life and ministry of the child of God or advances God's work.

2. Since prayer is one of the non-carnal weapons in the arsenal of the Christian (II Cor. 10:4), Satan will do everything possible to prevent the Christian from using it.

3. The believer is commanded to "resist the devil" (James 4:7). The attached promise is that "he will flee from you." It is not surprising that Satan seeks to keep the believer ignorant and inept in the use of one of the prime weapons of resistance—prayer.

2. The Bible and Prayer

"But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4).

These words of the apostles provide us with a succinct description of the apostolic ministry as viewed by themselves. That ministry had two principal parts: (1) prayer, and (2) the Word of God. It would appear that they viewed prayer and the Word of God as of equal importance. That the two ministries are closely bound together is evident. Much prayer without the guidance and balance of the Word of God will produce mysticism. Much study of the Bible without prayer produces a mechanical, academic approach to the Scriptures— something that is all too evident in our day.

The following ideas suggest something of the relationship that exists between the Bible and prayer. These matters are handled in more detail elsewhere in this book.

A. The Bible is the BASIS of all prayer.

1. All we know about prayer that is distinctively Christian is found in the Bible.

2. All we know about the God to whom we pray is found in the Bible. A knowledge of God is vital to a warm, effective prayer life. Scripture shows that those who have been mighty in prayer were those who knew God well.

3. Prayer flows out of accurate doctrine. The doctrines of Christianity are found in the Bible.

B. The Bible is the DIRECTIVE for prayer.

1. The necessity for prayer is stated and implied.

2. The various kinds of prayer (petition, intercession, thanksgiving, confession, etc.) are outlined in the Bible.

3. The conditions for effective prayer (faith, praying in the Spirit, in the will of God, etc.) are laid down in the Bible (see John 15:7).

C. The Bible is the CORRECTIVE for prayer.

Reasons why prayer is often unanswered (sin harbored in the life, an unforgiving spirit, selfishness, ignorance, etc.) are revealed in the Bible.

D. The Bible will often be the SUBJECT of prayer.

1. We are to pray for an understanding of the Word of God (see Ps. 119:18).

2. We are to claim the promises written in the Bible and to turn them into practice through prayer, as Daniel did (see Dan. 9).

3. We are to study the instruction and exhortations of the Bible and pray them into our lives. For example: "Lord, make this real in me."

4. We are to grasp the information of the Bible and turn it into praise and thanksgiving. For example: the sure victory of the Christian, the return of Christ, etc.

E. The Bible and its messengers will often be the OBJECT of prayer.

1. The Word of God is a "living" Word (see Heb. 4:12; I Pet. 1:23).

2. There is a sort of vitality in the Word itself (see Acts 6:7; 12:24; II Tim. 2:9).

3. What amounts to "activity" is attributed to the Word. It "increased" (Acts 6:7); "grew and multiplied" (Acts 12:24); and "is not bound" (II Tim. 2:9).

4. The Word of God is preached, taught, printed or distributed by the human instrument, and it is clear that the preacher, teacher, printer or distributor is to be the object of our prayers. But it is entirely in order to pray, not only for the human instrument, but also for the Word itself—that it might work with a full measure of quickening power (see Isa. 55:11; II Thess. 3:1).

F. The Bible provides the INSPIRATION for the life of prayer.

1. In the Bible are recorded the lives and experiences of the men God used—all of them men of prayer. For example: Moses, Samuel, David, Paul, etc.

2. In the Bible is found the record of the greatest of all men of prayer, the Lord Jesus Christ. If we would truly claim Him as Lord and Master, we will be people of prayer.

G. Conclusion.

1. A constant study of the Bible is essential for the nurture of the prayer life, and a consistent prayer life is essential for an understanding of the Bible.

2. A study of the Bible will produce a close walk with God; a close walk with God will include constant prayer that the Word will be filled with quickening power as it is given out by His messengers.

3. A study of the Bible will reveal the desperate need of a lost world; much prayer will produce vigorous messengers who move out into the world with the powerful Word.

4. Suggestion: For some heartwarming seasons of prayer, pray through (or pray in) a book of the Bible. Choose one of the shorter New Testament books, such as Philippians or Ephesians, and take a small portion of it each day. As you read, at each truth concerning God, salvation, heaven, etc., pause and give thanks. At each exhortation concerning character or service, pray that the Holy Spirit will make that virtue real in your own life. This is one of the highest functions in which the Bible can be employed.

3. The Theology of Prayer

This section does not include a total theology of prayer. From the hundreds of passages in the Bible on prayer, a book of large proportions might be written systematizing the entire subject. It could probably be shown that every major section of systematic theology makes its contribution to the subject. Consider, for example:

In THEOLOGY PROPER (especially the doctrine of God the Father) we see the whole reason and rationale of prayer laid out, as well as find the One to whom we pray.

In CHRISTOLOGY is found the right and provision of prayer.

In PNEUMATOLOGY the great Helper in prayer is discovered.

In ANTHROPOLOGY is the first cause of prayer-man is a dependent creature.

In HAMARTIOLOGY is the further need of prayer—man is a fallen, dependent creature.

In SOTERIOLOGY is the hope of prayer-fallen man has been redeemed to a new position and relationship with God, his Creator.

In SATANOLOGY is found the major hindrance to prayer.

In ANGELOLOGY there unfolds—though ever so sketchily—a picture of the heavenly helpers in answering prayer (see Dan. 10:4-14).

In ECCLESIOLOGY is discovered the great praying force: God's called-out ones.

In ESCHATOLOGY there is revealed one of the great culminating points of prayer: "Thy Kingdom come. . ."(Mt. 6:10).

Nowhere does Scripture seek to argue the validity or efficacy of prayer. It is everywhere assumed. "That godly men will pray is assumed; it is only necessary that they be instructed how to pray aright" (Spear, p. 11).

Only pertinent ideas concerning the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are dealt with here.

A. The doctrine of God and the practice of prayer.

1. There is One to whom prayer is addressed: "Our Father..." (Matt. 6:9); ". . . but prayer was made... unto God for him" (Acts 12:5).

2. Prayer is not just a subjective (psychological) exercise.

3. Real prayer has its basis in the nature and activity of God. Without such a basis, prayer has little meaning.

4. It is important, therefore, to know those truths about God that provide the underlying assumptions of prayer,

a. Omnipresence.

(1) Definition. God is everywhere present in His universe at the same time.

(2) Significance. There is no place beyond the reach of God's ear when His people pray.

(3) Examples. David's confession (Ps. 139:7-12); Jonah praying from the fish's belly (Jonah 2:2-9).

b. Omniscience.

(1) Definition. God knows all things: past, present, and future.

(2) Significance. There is no subject beyond the range of God's understanding.

(3) Examples. Acts 15:18; Ps. 139:1-6;

Rom. 11:33.

c. Omnipotence.

(1) Definition. God is able (has the power) to do all things that are compatible with His nature, plan and will.

(2) Significance. There is no work that is beyond the ability of God to perform on behalf of His people.

(3) Examples. Luke 1:37 ("For with God nothing shall be impossible"); Mark 10:27 (a great encouragement to pray for difficult cases); Jeremiah 32:27 and 33:3 (a challenge from God),

d. Sovereignty.

(1) Definition. God not only has the latent power and wisdom to do all things, but He actually does exercise absolute control over His universe.

(2) Significance. Prayer can be offered with great confidence that the One to whom we pray is in control of all things. How He answers our prayers, therefore, will be determined by our adjustment to His perfect will and program.

(3) Examples. Psalm 103:19 (". . . his kingdom ruleth over all"); Romans 8:28 (". . . all things work . . . for good . . ."); Revelation 19:6 (". . . the Lord God omnipotent reigneth").

e. Moral attributes.

(1) These include God's love, mercy, holiness, righteousness, faithfulness, truth, etc.

(2) Considered together, the moral attributes of God announce several things to us.

(a) Because of His love, mercy, and faithfulness, we can be sure that God delights to hear and answer the prayers of His people.

(b) Because of His perfect holiness, righteousness and truth, we can be sure that (1) God will not answer prayers that would be dishonoring to His Person or detrimental to His purpose and work, and (2) He will not violate His own nature by hearing the presumptuous prayers of the unrighteous.

f. Freedom.

(1) By the freedom of God is meant that He may do anything that is not contradictory to His nature, will and purpose. That is, He is not bound or compelled by any force outside Himself.

(2) The significance of this is twofold.

(a) It provides an answer to the question: "Why is prayer necessary when God exercises sovereign control over all things?" (Answer: He has chosen to limit Himself to the prayers of His people for the accomplishment of some things.)

(b) God is free to answer our prayers. He is not bound by any force outside His own nature, character and purpose.

B. Jesus Christ and prayer.

1. The biblical material concerning the place which Jesus Christ has in Christian prayer may be divided into three categories: (1) His teaching about prayer, (2) His example in prayer, and (3) His present office as mediator between God and man.

2. Since the first two of these categories will be considered in separate studies, we will presently give consideration only to His work as high priest and mediator,

a. The invitation to pray (Heb .4:14-16).

(1) Prayer can be offered with confidence.

(2) There is provision for the past: "mercy"—and for the present: "grace."

(3) The provision is continuous:"… in time of need."

b. The ground for praying (Heb. 4:14, 15).

(1) Our great High Priest is now functioning on our behalf: "For we have . . . ."

(2) Our great High Priest sympathizes with our weaknesses.

(3) He has been tempted in all things(in every area of life) just as we are tempted (see Heb. 2:17, 18;5:7-10).

c. The assurance in prayer (Heb. 10:19-22).

(1) We enter into "the holiest" on the ground of "the blood of Jesus." That is, His atoning death upon the cross has made it possible for us to pray "in full assurance of faith."

(2) Consider further Romans 8:31-34, noting especially the recurrence of "for us." The eternal God is on our side as proven by the fact that He gave His Son for us and that His Son now intercedes for us in glory. (That prayer is in view here may be seen by the phrase "freely give us all things" in verse 32. See also Hebrews 7:25).

C. The Holy Spirit and prayer.

There are a number of passages which will be considered under another heading. Here we will consider just two principal ideas.

a. The Holy Spirit gives the believer the ability and desire to pray (Rom. 8:15; Gal 4:6).

(1) The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of adoption," that is, it is He who gives us the inward assurance that we are indeed sons of God.

(2) "Abba" is a word of intimacy, and close communion (see Mark 14:36).

(3) The believer cries (Rom. 8:15) and the Spirit cries (Gal. 4:6); thus, it is the Spirit "by which" the believer is brought into a consciousness of his son-Father relationship.

(4) Conclusion: As surely as a true son desires communion with his earthly father, so a true child of God will desire communion with his Heavenly Father,

b. The Holy Spirit intercedes for the believer (Romans 8:26, 27).

(1) The Spirit helps the believer's "weakness" (the word is singular). That weakness includes the ignorance of what we should pray for.

(2) In view of our ignorance, the Spirit intercedes for us with "groanings too deep for words." This is certainly not "speaking in tongues." Rather, it is a groaning done by the Spirit and heard by the Father.

(3) The Spirit's intercession—His petition—is in perfect accord with the will of God.

(4) The Father ("He who searches the heart") knows perfectly the mind of the Spirit. Thus, we can count on the intercession of the Spirit when, in our ignorance, we do not know what to pray for but our heart is desirous of doing the will of God.

4. The Prayer Life of Jesus

There is a certain reasonableness in looking at the practices and teachings of Jesus on the subject of prayer.

First, He is the master teacher on any subject He touches. He has much to say about prayer.

Second, He is the pattern man for every believer. If we would in any serious manner seek to emulate Him, His constant and consistent practice of prayer must be observed.

Third, the essence of holy living is Christlikeness (I John 2:6; Rom. 8:28, 29). Certainly no Christian can be said to have approached Christlikeness who does not give prayer a large place in his life.

The Gospels record 15 times during the ministry of Jesus when He prayed. We will glance briefly at each of these.

A. At His baptism

(Luke 3:21).

1. It was while waiting in prayer that He received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. (see Isa. 42:1; 61:1; Acts 10:38; Luke 3:21,22).

2. This was a crisis time in the life of Jesus. He was stepping out of the obscurity of His Nazareth home into the limelight of His messianic ministry that would be characterized by words and works of power. Therefore, He prayed.

3. This is suggestive. See Acts 4:23-33 (especially v. 31). Prayer produces power!

B. Following a very busy day in Capernaum

(Mark 1:35; Luke 4:42).

1. On that day in the city He had taught in the synagogue service, been interrupted by a demon-possessed man whom He cured, healed Peter's mother-in-law, and faced a great crowd of diseased and demonized people.

2. But instead of "sleeping in" the following morning, He got up early to pray.

3. When the disciples found Him and reminded Him that a great crowd was waiting to see Him again, He told them that He must move on to other towns and villages.

4. There are lessons we may learn.

a. The busier the day, the greater the need for time in prayer,

b. We may get our "marching orders" for the day in the quiet place of prayer,

c. Prayer clears the vision, defines duty, sweetens the spirit and strengthens the resolve.

C. While being thronged by the multitudes

(Luke5:16,NIV).

1. "But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

2. The wording suggests a habit of action that pervaded His busy days.

3. Thronged by the people, He had less opportunity for prayer but more need, so at every opportunity He retired from the crowds to pray.

4. The greater the outer pressure of our lives, the more jealously we must guard against a shortening of the prayer time. Prayer is protection against frustration.

D. Before choosing the Twelve

(Lk. 6:12).

1. "In those days . . ." These were days of: a. Popularity with the thronging crowds, b. Mounting hostility of the Pharisees, c. Choosing those who would be foundation stones for His great spiritual edifice, the church (see Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14; Matt. 16:18).

2. In the quietness of that all-night prayer vigil, God the Father "gave" twelve men to Jesus (see John 17:6, 9, 11, 12).

3. Lessons we may learn:

a. Important decisions should be preceded by much prayer,

b. Prayer includes communion with God. It is inconceivable that Jesus spent all that time asking,

c. Every true local church of Jesus Christ should follow this example when it is time to choose officers, call a pastor, etc. Times of protracted prayer should always precede the action.

E. After feeding the 5,000 and facing an old temptation

(Matt. 14:22, 23; Mark 6:45, 46; John 6:15).

1. Note carefully what preceded this night on the mountain.

a. He received news of the death of John the Baptist—an emotional moment (Matt. 14:12).

b. Wanting retirement and rest, He went to the northeast side of the lake, but the crowds followed Him there (Matt. 14:13).

c. He taught them (Mark 6:34) and healed their sick (Matt. 14:14) throughout the remainder of the day and then fed the entire crowd by a mighty miracle of multiplication,

d. Whipped into an excitement by the wonder of His miracles, they tried to make Him their King (John 6:15).

e. He sent His disciples across the lake and retired to the mountain to pray (Matt. 14:23).

2. We can only speculate concerning the actual content of His praying. It would seem that it would have included thanksgiving for deliverance from the temptation, request for physical and mental renewal, and power to encourage the faith of His troubled disciples out there on the lake. (Did He also receive special power for walking on the water and enabling Peter to do the same?)

F. At Caesarea Philippi

(Luke 9:18).

1. What strange expression captures the attention here?

2 Jesus knew something of a solitude of the spirit that enabled Him to get alone with the Father even when others were present.

3. "Some of these later incidents seem to suggest that He was trying to woo them (the Twelve) into something of the same love for the fascination of secret power that He had" (Gordon, p. 220).

G. At the Transfiguration

(Luke 9:29).

1. He was transfigured while praying.

2. There is something suggestive here (see Rom. 12:2; II Cor. 3:18). Does not prayer play a part in that gradual "metamorphosis" that is to be taking place in the life of the believer?

H. After the return of the Seventy

(Luke 10:20, 21).

1. This seems to be something of an ejaculatory prayer.

2. Here is an outburst of the gladness of His heart. He seemed to be always conscious of the Father's presence, and it was completely natural to speak to Him.

I. When His praying stirred the desire of the disciples

(Luke 11:1).

1. No doubt these men were praying men, but they recognized a quality in Jesus' praying that made them feel that they didn't know anything about prayer at all.

2. Their request, "Lord, teach us to pray," called forth the important Parable of the Persistent Neighbor. (We shall study that separately in the next section.)

J. At the raising of Lazarus

(John 11:41, 42).

1. It is evident that before coming to the tomb He had been praying in secret about the raising of Lazarus, and the events that transpire now are in answer to His prayer.

2. As we examine these various instances of Jesus' prayer life, the picture emerges that He did His mighty works in the power of the Holy Spirit, which He laid hold of through prayer.

K. When some Greek visitors were brought to Him

(John 12:27, 28).

1. This is an ejaculatory prayer—an outburst of deep emotional feeling uttered in the presence of believers and unbelievers alike.

2. The request is a reflection of His real humanity. To shrink back from the possibility of a violent death was altogether human and not at all sinful.

3. The immediate submission to the Father is a reflection of the highest ultimate purpose of prayer—the glory of God.

4. The answer of the Father from heaven is evidence and demonstration that petitions in prayer may indeed bring objective results.

L. His intercession for Peter

(Luke 22:31, 32).

1. Here is the reflection of one of His prayer habits. He had been praying for Peter by name. He was an intercessor.

2. Intercession is still the very heart of the risen Lord's prayer ministry (see Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:34).

3. This prayer was most certainly answered. It was not Peter's faith that failed, but His courage.

M. His high priestly prayer

(John 17).

1. This is truly the "Lord's Prayer." It is an actual prayer prayed by Jesus on the night before His death. The exact location where the prayer was uttered is uncertain, but it is apparently somewhere between Jerusalem and Gethsemane.

2. A classic exposition of this chapter is Our Lord Prays for His Own by Marcus Rainsford (Moody Press). Another is Listen! Jesus Is Praying by Warren Wiersbe (Tyndale House).

3. The prayer easily divides itself into three sections as our Lord prayed for Himself, for His apostles and for His future church, a. Christ's prayer for Himself (vv. 1-5).

(1) The petition: "Glorify thy Son . . . glorify Thou me" (vv. 1, 5).

(2) The purpose: ". . . that thy Son also may glorify Thee" (v. 1).

(3) The plea: His completed work

(vv. 2-4).

b. Christ's prayer for His apostles (vv. 6-19).

(1) The petition: "Keep them" (vv. 11,15) from worldly enemies, sin and Satan. "Sanctify them" (v. 17). The Word of God is the instrument of sanctification.

(2) The purpose: Unity (v. 11) and joy (v. 13). (See John 15:11).

(3) The plea: Relationship to God (vv. 6-8, 10) and relationship to the world (v. 11). This is the reason for their need of divine keeping (see John 15:18).

c. Christ's prayer for His church (vv. 20-26).

(1) The petition: That they might be one in life (v. 21) and one in abode (v. 24).

(2) The purpose: In the present (vv. 21,23), "that the world may believe"; and in the future (v. 24), "that they may behold my glory."

(3) The plea: Christ's union with the Father (vv. 21-23) and the Father's love for Christ (vv. 24, 25). 4. In summary, the prayer is for: 1) the glorification of Christ, 2) the preservation of the apostles, and 3) the unification of all believers.

N. In the Garden of Gethsemane

(Matt. 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42; Luke 22:39-46).

1. The contrast between the serenity of the prayer of John 17 and the intensity of this prayer is to be seen in the fact that the former was intercessory in nature, while the prayer in Gethsemane is very personal.

2. Once again our Lord's real humanity is seen in His shrinking back from the "cup"—from the suffering and separation from the Father that was coming on the morrow.

3. It is quite impossible to compare this struggle with anything in our own experience because it involves the "hypostatic union" of the two natures in Christ as well as His vicarious suffering for us.

4. But note His desire for human companionship in this hour of deep need: ". . . tarry ye here, and watch with me." Here is a longing for fellowship in prayer.

5. Note also, the reason given for great failure in prayer: "... the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

6. Note, further, His total submission to the Father's will, whatever His own human feelings might be: ". . . nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt."

O. The prayers from the cross

(Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34; Luke 23:34, 46).

Just as our Lord began His ministry in prayer (Luke 3:21), so also He closed it in prayer. Of the seven "words" of Jesus from the cross, three of them are prayers. Surely, the habits of the life are reflected in the moment of death.

1. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

a. This is an intercessory prayer. His hands could no longer do the work of God; His feet could no longer walk in the ways of God; but the highest of all services was still open to Him as He prayed for His tormentors.

b. We are faced here with one of the great objects of our prayers, namely, those who have wronged us. We are commanded to love our enemies and to pray for those who wrong us (Matt. 5:44). This often seems impossible, but it becomes much easier when we determine to pray for them as Jesus prayed for those who were murdering Him.

2. "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

a. This is the cry of our Sin-Bearer as all our iniquity was laid on Him. It was personal, intense, agonizing and unfathomable.

b. What can we learn that should be of value to our prayer life? Surely we see the enormity of sin and should therefore be quick to ask for personal forgiveness and cleansing.

3. "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46).

a. Prayer was the habit of Jesus' life. He prayed "without ceasing." Now He concludes His life as He lived it—in peaceful communion with the Father.

b. Do we want to die well? Then we must live well. And the only kind of life that passes through the experience of death properly is the life of prayer.

J. Oswald Sanders has generally summarized the prayer life of Jesus in his work The Incomparable Christ (Moody Press) as follows:

The POSTURE of His Prayers

While bodily posture is secondary to the attitude of the soul, it is instructive to note that at times Jesus prayed while standing, just where He happened to be at the moment. At another time, He knelt, while on yet another occasion it is recorded that He fell on His face. "If the Son of God got down upon His knees, yes upon His face before God, what attitude should we ordinary mortals assume as we go into His presence?" While posture is not everything, it is something.

The PLACE of His Prayers

1) He prayed in secret—shut in with God, shut out from all else.

2) He prayed in company with others.

3) He prayed in solitude on the mountainside. James Stalker suggested that when Jesus reached a new town, His first thought was, what was the shortest way to the mountain, just as travelers inquire the way to the best hotel.

The OCCASION of His Prayers

1) He prayed in the morning, at the gateway of the day, and in the evening when the day's work was over.

2) Great crises were preceded by prayer. At His baptism, before selecting the apostles, at the Transfiguration, etc.

3) Great achievements were preceded by prayer. Feeding of the 4000, walking on the sea, raising of Lazarus, etc.

4) Great achievements were followed by prayer (see John 6:15 and parallels).

5) Great pressure of work was a call to extra prayer.

6) Great sorrows were met in prayer.

7) He died praying. His very last utterance was one of trustful prayer.

The CHARACTER of His Prayers

1) His prayers revealed a filial spirit. "Father," "O my Father," etc.

2) His prayers were replete with thanksgiving.

Whether He walked in the light or in the shadow, thanksgiving was an integral part of His life.

3) In His prayer, communion played a large part. Jesus missed unspeakably the glory and communion He had shared with the Father, and after living in the foul miasmas of earth He pined for the clear atmosphere of heaven.

4) His prayers embraced petition and supplication. He did not hesitate to pray for His own needs.

5) His prayers included pointed intercession. His intercessions included the interests and spiritual advancement of His disciples, the deep need of those who had not experienced His saving grace, the rebellious, and even those who crucified Him.

6) His prayers were invariably answered. "I know that thou hearest me always" (John 11:42). His assurance was based on the fact that He knew He always prayed according to the will of His Father. He refused to pray for the 12 legions of angels who would have sped to His assistance because He knew it to be contrary to God's will (Matt. 26:53, 54).

7) His prayers reveal His total submission to the will of the Father. In cases where the divine will was not fully revealed, Jesus maintained an attitude of submission—"Not my will, but thine, be done." This petition shows the essence of real power—total surrender to a full correspondence with the mind, will and character of God.

The Prayer Life of Jesus

Since Christ was God, why must He pray?
By Him all things were known and made,
Omniscient and omnipotent,
Why need He ever ask for aid?
Ah! But He put His glory by,
Forgot a while His power great,

Humbled Himself, took human form
And stripped Himself of royal state.

For Christ was also Man; to feel
Man's strongest tempting, and to know
His utmost weakness, He became
Like other men and suffered so.
And touched with our infirmities,
For those few years like us to be,
He still remembers we are dust,
Since He was tempted like as we.

But well He knew the source of help,
Whence comes all power, strength and peace,
In blest communion with His God,
Care and perplexity would cease.
When all earth's sorrow and its sin
Too heavy on His spirit weighed,
Quiet and solitude He sought
And to His Father prayed.

—Annie Johnson Flint

5. The Prayer Teaching of Jesus

We will examine the teaching of Jesus concerning prayer, looking at the record in the Gospels in the order in which the teachings appear.

A. The Sermon on the Mount: concerning our enemies

(Matt. 5:44, 45).

1. The context: Here is an example of that righteousness that exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees (v. 20).

2. The command: to pray for those who are persecuting us.

a. This was exemplified by our Lord (Luke 23:34). See also Acts 7:60 for the example of Stephen.

b. This is the very best way to prevent a bitter spirit from getting a grip on us. 3. The rationale: The child of God is to portray the attitudes and actions of his Father (w. 45-48).

B. The Sermon on the Mount: special instruction in prayer

(Matt. 6:5, 6).

1. The privacy of prayer (vv. 5, 6).

2. The wrong way and its results (v. 5).

3. The private place: "Enter into thy closet."

4. The private conversation: "Pray to thy Father which is in secret."

5. The private reward: "Thy Father . . . shall reward thee."

C. The simplicity of prayer

(Matt. 6:7, 8).

1. Beware of vain repetitions (v. 7). (Some Orientals would repeat a single sentence until they were exhausted with it and would assume that their very exhaustion was a sign of power.)

2. The reason for the prohibition (v. 8): The Father knows our needs. (Note: This does not deny the necessity of persistence in prayer. We should ask, but not because of His ignorance.)

D. The pattern for prayer

(Matt. 6:9-15).

This might properly be called the "disciples' prayer" and was never intended to be used as a public ritual prayer. It provides a model, or pattern, for our praying in general,

a. Adoration of God (v. 9).

(1) His Fatherhood: "Our Father" (see Rom. 8:15).

(2) His transcendence: "which art in heaven."

(3) His immanence: the fact that we can speak to Him and He can hear.

(4) His holiness: "hallowed be thy name."

b. Request for the accomplishment of His purposes (v. 10).

c. "Thy kingdom come" (see the last prayer of the Bible in Rev. 22:20). Question: Does prayer really have some effect on the coming of Christ?

d. "Thy will be done … in heaven."

(1) In heaven the will of God is carried out willingly, perfectly and sinlessly.

(2) This provides a model for our earthly service. (Note the close connection between the promise of answered prayer, the command to keep the commandments of Christ, and the promise of the enabling Holy Spirit in John 14:13-16.)

e. Request for material needs (v. 11).

(1) This covers all material needs (see Prov. 30:7-9; Phil. 4:11, 19).

(2) Such a pattern for prayer poses some very practical problems for 20th-century, prosperous Christians.

f. Request for spiritual needs (vv. 12, 13).

(1) Forgiveness (v. 12). A constant need as long as we are in the flesh.

(2) Deliverance from any situation in which, because of our own weakness or Satan's cunning, we might succumb to sin (v. 13).

(a) There is a tempter (I Thess. 3:5).

(b) We are bound to be tempted in this life (James 1:2, 3; I Pet. 4:12, 13).

(c) God has provided an answer to our petition (I Cor. 10:13).

g. The condition for an answer to a request for forgiveness (vv. 14, 15).

(1) This is not a condition for salvation but a condition for an affirmative response to a request for forgiveness by the children of God. This is a family matter. It is a warning.

(2) God will not hear the prayers for forgiveness of those who themselves are unforgiving. The broader principle is laid down in Ps. 66:18. An unforgiving spirit is such a sin and a hindrance to prayer.

E. The Sermon on the Mount: persistent praying

(Matt. 7:7-11).

There may be a connection here with the solemn commands given in the preceding verses to avoid censorious judgment on the one hand and to exercise careful discrimination on the other. This certainly requires divine guidance and wisdom. But, of course, the principle of prayer here laid down is broader than that. This becomes clear in Jesus' use of this same teaching in Luke 11.

a. The persistence of prayer (v. 7). The verbs "ask... seek... knock" are in the present tense and indicate ontinuous action. Hence: "Go on again and again asking, seeking, knocking

b. The intensity of prayer. To "seek" is more fervent than just to "ask," and to "knock" is still more fervent (see James 5:16).

c. The incentive for prayer (v. 8). Those who persistently, intently pray will receive their request.

d. The logic of prayer (vv. 9-11). As earthly fathers prove themselves good fathers by giving "good gifts" to their children, so our Heavenly Father, in answer to persistent, fervent prayer, will give us good gifts (see Luke 11:13).

F. The parable of the persistent neighbor

(Luke 11:1-13).

1. The request (v. 1).

a. It was prompted by Jesus' praying. Indeed, it was the Lord's praying that led to "The Lord's Prayer."

b. What was it that stirred the disciple? Was he asking, "Lord, teach us to really pray"?

c. Prayer was common exercise to the Jew. John had taught his disciples about prayer.

2. The answer (the model prayer, vv. 2-4).

a. The first division: the God to whom we pray.

b. The second division: our daily wants,

c. The third division: our daily dangers.

3. The parable (vv. 5-8).

a. Palestinian travelers often traveled at night in order to escape the heat. Hospitality is a matter of highest honor in eastern lands. "My children are with me in bed . . . ." All slept together on a raised platform.

b. "Importunity." This is the only place in the New Testament where the word is used. The idea: shamelessness; freedom from that bashfulness that cannot ask a second time; shameless begging.

4. The application (vv. 9-13).

a. Jesus is not giving a discourse on the whole subject of prayer. He says nothing about the will of God, praying in Jesus' name, etc. He is emphasizing just one important truth: God the Father is willing to answer prayer. His response to prayer is not like, but is in contrast to, the sleepy-headed neighbor.

b. "Ask . . . seek . . . knock." These expressions describe earnestness in praying. While God desires to answer our prayers, He wants seriousness of purpose to be evident in our praying.

(1) The very emphasis of this parable (God's willingness to answer) tells us that there is a purpose, or reason, for His seeming delay in answering.

(2) We may be praying about something that is not the best thing for us (see Paul and his thorn, II Cor. 12:1-10).

(3) We may be praying earnestly, but there is sin that prevents God's answer (see Joshua at Ai, Josh. 7:10-26).

(4) We may be "asking amiss" (James 4:3, 4)—an utterly selfish prayer prompted by wrong motives.

(5) Whatever the case, persisting in prayer will prove our earnestness about the matter, and God will show us where the problem lies,

c. The contrast drawn.

(1) If an earthly father (a sinful, weak person) knows how to give good gifts to his children, how much more shall a perfect Heavenly Father give gifts to His children?

(2) The Holy Spirit is the highest and best gift of all.

(3) This probably refers to Holy Spirit power, whether in the old dispensation or the new.

5. The conclusion.

Prayer is not overcoming God's reluctance; it is adjusting to God's willingness. God never sleeps, so He is never disturbed when we approach Him. God does not answer our much praying in order to get rid of us, but because He loves us.

G. The parable of the unjust judge

(Luke 18:1-8).

The parable is dealing broadly with truth of the time between the first and second comings of Christ.

a. The purpose of the parable (v. 1).

(1) "… men ought always to pray."

(2) "Always"—without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17); instant in prayer (Rom. 12:12).

(3) How do we do this? It is a habit, a

frame of mind, an attitude,

b. The alternatives of the parable (v. 1).

(1) Fainting, stumbling along the way, caving in under pressure and stress (see II Cor. 4:1, 16).

(2) Faith expresses itself to God in prayer; prayer nourishes faith and courage.

(3) "When faith fails, prayer dies. In order to pray, then, we must have faith; and that our faith fail not, we must pray. Faith pours forth prayer; and the pouring forth of the heart in prayer gives steadfastness to faith" (Augustine).

c. The narration of the parable (vv. 2-5).

d. The application of the parable (vv. 6-8).

(1) If an unworthy, sinful, uncom-passionate, self-seeking judge will finally act because of persistence in requesting, how much more will your Heavenly Father respond to your prayers?

(2) This is a parable of contrast. The judge in the parable stands in contrast to our Father in heaven.

(3) Elect people are praying people. This is assumed.

(4) God "bears long" with His people. Why? (see II Pet. 3:9, 15). God's long-suffering with a world that is often hostile to His people is so that the salvation of many may be obtained.

(5) God will avenge quickly, suddenly (not "in a short time"). (See I Thess. 5:3; II Thess. 1:7-10).

(6) As the age moves closer to its consummation, believers will be an ever-decreasing number. "Will He find the faith?"

(7) Conditions between the first and second comings will not be conducive to prayer, but pray on.

(8) Does prayer have anything to do with the return of Christ? (See Rev. 22:20).

H. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican

(Luke 18:9-14).

The parable was given to counteract a particular sin: "unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." Our Lord is here denouncing and seeking to correct the sin of self-righteousness,

a. Two men (v. 10).

(1) The main point is that the publican knew his own heart and true condition, but the Pharisee did not.

(2) The cure for self-righteousness is self-knowledge. If we know ourselves, we will not be going about flaunting our goodness and virtues.

b. Two prayers (vv. 11-13).

(1) The Pharisee's prayer: What was wrong with it?

(2) The publican's prayer, by contrast, was a revelation of the heart of the man. The attitude and approach were entirely different. He identified himself as a (the) sinner. ("Merciful" is the word elsewhere translated "propitiated.")

(3) The Pharisee voiced the most common error and misconception held by men of the world: He thought he would be accepted by God for what he had done and what he was.

(4) The publican voiced the universal need of man—mercy. Two results (v. 14).

(1) The publican went down to his house justified; the Pharisee did not.

(2) What does this parable teach us about prayer?

(a) A humble spirit is necessary to get the ear of God.

(b) It is possible to go through the motions of praying without praying at all.

(c) God does hear the prayer of the unsaved when that prayer is for mercy and forgiveness.

I. Prayer teaching in the Upper Room Discourse: praying in Jesus' name.

1. Scriptural teaching.

a. "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it" (John 14:13, 14).

b. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).

c. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

d. "And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: for the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God" (John 16:23-27).

2. The newness of praying in Jesus' name,

a. This instruction marks the climax of Jesus' teaching on prayer. It introduces an element that was entirely new to the apostles' prayer experience: "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name" (John 16:24).

b. This instruction introduces a new power into the apostles' prayer experience: "whatsoever . . . if ye shall ask any thing . . ." (John 14:13, 14). There would always be an affirmative answer to such praying.

3. The meaning of praying in Jesus' name, a. He did not define what He meant. Why?

(1) Significance of "name."

(2) The "name" stands for the person. It speaks of His character, qualities, position and authority (see Ezek. 36:22; John 17:6; 3:18).

b. "Is it not a staggering thought that our unique and glorious Lord has authorized us to make use of His mighty name in our prayers? There is obviously infinitely greater significance in this than merely appending the formula 'in Jesus' name' to our prayers, for His name enshrines not only His love but also His power" (Sanders, p. 57).

c. Praying in Jesus' name is to plead on the basis of His character, authority and power, not our own.

(1) Contrast: the Pharisee who paraded his own virtues (Luke 18:9-14).

(2) Comparison: the king who entrusted the use of his power and authority to Esther and Mordecai (Esther 8:7, 8).

(3) The Holy Spirit would act on behalf of Christ, doing what Christ would do if He were in the world (John 14:26).

d. When we pray in Jesus' name, we shall pray only for things that are consistent with His name and character.

(1) "To pray in the Name of Christ is to pray as one who is at one with Christ, whose mind is the mind of Christ, whose desires are the desires of Christ, and whose purpose is one with that of Christ . . . . Prayers offered in the Name of Christ are scrutinized and sanctified by His nature, His purpose, and His will. Prayer is endorsed by the Name, when it is in harmony with the character, mind, desire and purpose of the Name" (Chadwick, pp. 37-39).

(2) How can we know what things are consistent with His name and character?

(a) By His Word abiding in us (John 15:7). All effective praying is nurtured in the Word of God.

(1) The Word informs us of specific things for which we can pray, and

(2) the Word cleanses our desires and ambitions from those impurities that would hinder effective prayer.

(b) By the Holy Spirit's work in us. "In that day..." (John 16:23) speaks of the day when the outpoured Spirit would lead into all truth (John 16:13). This is the day of the Holy Spirit, hence, the day when God's people can expect guidance in praying.

4. The results of praying in Jesus' name.

a. Such praying produces affirmative answers (John 14:13, 14).

b. Such praying glorifies God (John 14:13).

c. Such praying brings joy to the one engaging in it (John 15:11; 16:24).

5. Some observations about praying in Jesus' name.

a. The sure promise of affirmative answers to the praying of John 14:13, 14 stands in contrast to the privilege of "letting your requests be made known unto God" of Philippians 4:6, 7.

(1) The Philippians admonition seems to recognize that there are some things about which we do not know the will of God.

(2) However, because we are children of the Heavenly Father, we can ask anything we wish, leaving the ultimate disposal of our request in the hands of the Father, in whom we have absolute confidence.

(3) The result of praying with this trusting attitude will be that "the peace of God . . . shall keep your hearts and minds . . . ."

b. The prayer "in the name of Jesus" takes some time: time for getting guidance from the Word, for self-examination, for cleansing of the motives, and for adjusting one's whole spiritual frame to the will of God.

c. One can pray "in Jesus' name" without saying those words. It is an attitude—a sense of dependence and position. Contrariwise, the use of the phrase itself can be meaningless.

6. Intercessory Prayer

This kind of prayer is perhaps the noblest of all. It draws the believer out of himself into the lives of others; it enlarges his own soul, expands his interests and increases his sympathies. It brings him very near to Christ, for He was constantly giving of Himself to others, serving others and praying for others.

1. The first prayer recorded in the Bible was a prayer of intercession (Gen. 18:23-33).

2. Many of the recorded prayers, both in the Old and New Testaments, are intercessory prayers.

3. Jesus Himself engaged in intercessory prayer during the days of His flesh, and it is His chief function today (John 17; Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25).

4. Intercessory prayer is a positive service rendered by the believer on the behalf of others. That service will ultimately touch the church, society, and the entire world.

A. DEFINITION of intercessory prayer.

1. The word translated "intercessions" in I Timothy 2:1 does not necessarily contain the idea of praying for someone else. The rendering is inexact. The word rather denotes an approach to God in confident, familiar prayer.

2. The idea of praying on behalf of others is clear in the context of this passage and in many, many other passages both in the Old and New Testaments. (For example: Paul praying for the church or requesting his readers to pray for him, etc.)

3. Intercession means simply to make request or petition on behalf of, or for the benefit of, another person or persons. In intercession the believer is acting as an intermediary between God and man.

B. EXAMPLES of intercessory prayer.

1. Abraham praying for Sodom (Gen. 18:23-33).

2. Moses praying for sinning Israel (Ex. 32:1-14).

3. Jesus praying for Peter (Luke 22:31, 32), for the apostles (John 17:6-19) and for the entire church (John 17:20-26).

4. Paul praying for his readers (Rom. 1:9; Eph. 1:15-23; 3:14-19; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:3-13).

C. OBJECTS for intercessory prayer.

1. Physical and material needs of others. (Can you find an example of this in Scripture?) In the average church prayer meeting, this is where the great emphasis is placed.

2. Spiritual needs of others. Nearly all of Paul's recorded prayers on behalf of his readers fall into this category. (Study carefully Paul's prayers for his readers. Gleanings From Paul by A. W. Pink would be helpful reading.)

3. Needs of new converts as a part of the above category (Gal. 4:19).

4. Ministry needs of others, such as pastors, teachers, evangelists, missionaries, etc. (Rom. 15:30-32; Eph. 6:18-20; HThess. 3:1, 2).

5. For our enemies (Matt. 5:44; Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60). It is difficult to hate, resent or otherwise feel ill toward those for whom you are praying.

6. Rulers and all in places of authority (I Tim. 2:1, 2). Note the reason for such prayer in verses 2-4.

7. Family (parents for children, each member for the others, etc.).

a. Examples abound of men and women who bear testimony that their salvation traces to the prayers of godly parents.

b. Parents must teach their children to pray at the earliest possible age.

8. The unsaved. Some specific requests on behalf of the unsaved include:

a. That God will remove that which seems

to be a hindrance to his/her salvation,

b. That he/she will be brought under the

sound of the Gospel,

c. That the Word of God will powerfully

work in his/her heart, d. That God will draw him/her to Christ

(John 6:44).

e. What others can you name?

9. "For all men" (I Tim. 2:1). There is a place for general prayer.

D. MOVING MEN through intercessory prayer.

Some have found problems in considering moving the minds and wills of men through prayer. They ask: "Has not God given to men the awesome ability even to resist Him, to say no to His commands? Does not man possess free agency? Are we not seeking to violate man's free will by imposing our will upon him through prayer?"

We are indeed involved with the complex problem of personality. It does seem necessary for the hearts and minds of men to be moved in a direction different from that which they have presently chosen. But this is exactly what the Scripture teaches will happen when God's people pray in His will for other people.

1. The general Bible teaching.

a. It is taught by inference in I John 5:16 (prayer for the erring brother),

b. It is taught by inference in I Tim. 2:1, 2 (prayer for those in authority),

c. It is taught by inference throughout the Bible, wherever prayer on behalf of somebody else is mentioned.

2. Specific Bible teaching that God is sovereign even over the minds of men. "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases" (Prov. 21:1, NIV).

3. Clear biblical examples that God is sovereign over the minds of men.

a. The Lord made the Egyptians favorably disposed toward the Israelites (Ex. 12:36).

b. The Lord changed the attitude of the King of Assyria so that he assisted the Jews in the work on the house of God (Ezra 6:22).

c. The Lord smote Nebuchadnezzar with insanity and restored him again (Dan. 4:28-37).

d. The Lord will use Cyrus "to accomplish all that I please . . . though you have not acknowledged me ...." (Isa. 44:28-45:7, NIV).

e. God put a thought to issue a decree in the mind of the Roman emperor in order that Jesus might be born in the right place (Bethlehem) and at exactly the right time (Luke 2:1-3). 4. Biblical examples of God moving men in answer to prayer.

a. When Ezra returned to Jerusalem, the people of Israel were in such a backslidden condition that preaching seemed to do little good. Then he went to prayer and moved the nation by his prayers (Ezra 9, 10).

b. Abraham's servant was sent in search of a bride for Isaac. In order to know who she should be, he prayed that she would act, talk and respond in a particular way. In answer, a certain woman, Rebekah, acted, talked and responded in the exact way he had requested (Gen. 24:12-20).

c. Nehemiah wanted to do something to help rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, so he prayed to God to make this possible. Artaxerxes was moved not only to permit Nehemiah to return to rebuild the walls but to supply needed materials as well(Neh. 1:4-2:9).

5. Conclusion.

Whether or not we can solve the intellectual and philosophical problems involved in matters of human personality, self-determination, free will, etc., it is clear that we are commanded to pray for others, and such prayer makes a difference.

6. Application.

a. Countries that are "closed" to the Gospel. God can move the minds of rulers,

b. Complex government relations that many missionaries face,

c. Government matters that affect the work of the Gospel,

d. Interpersonal problems that are a part of every Gospel work: in the church, on a mission station, in a school, etc. Some cannot be dealt with "head-on" without causing great disturbance and harm to the Lord's work. But God can move the thoughts and change the minds of the troubling parties.

e. Concerning an unsaved person. There are times when no further witnessing, preaching, persuading or arguing avails. The person must be put into the hands of the Lord through persistent, prevailing prayer.

E. The REFLEX ACTION of intercessory prayer.

In addition to the direct benefits to those for whom prayer is made, there are reflex benefits to the one who prays. These do not constitute a major motivation for faithfulness in prayer; but as in all things, when God is obeyed, great blessing accrues to the obedient one.

1. Interests are enlarged.

If I am committed to pray for a servant of the Lord in Paraguay, I am going to take new interest in the affairs and conditions of that country.

2. Sympathies are deepened.

A friend shares a deep burden, and I commit myself to pray. I become sensitive to that matter, not only in him but in others.

3. Spiritual sensitivity is sharpened.

I commit myself to pray for a spiritual battle that a friend is having (e.g. some hatred, struggles in the thought life, covetousness or laziness). As a result, I see some of the same conditions in myself that I had not noticed before.

4. Genuine joy is experienced (see John 15:11; 16:24).

This joy is one of the "family" privileges of the child of God.

5. Christlike character is enhanced.

Christ came into the world for others. He lived for others, He died for others, He lives today for others, and one day He is coming again for others. Any selfishness is the exact opposite of Christlikeness. Intercessory prayer takes our interests outside ourselves and to that degree, fosters our growth in character.

7. The Present Intercession of Christ

"Who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:34).

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25).

A. The FACT of Christ's intercession.

1. The passages above indicate clearly that a part of Christ's present ministry in heaven is interceding for His people.

2. This ministry began when He ascended into heaven and will continue until all His redeemed ones are with Him, glorified and perfected (see also Heb. 9:24; I John 2:1).

B. The nature of Christ's intercession IN GENERAL.

1. It is not primarily vocal.

a. His intercession consists mainly of His presence in heaven on our behalf (Heb. 9:24), although the idea of vocal request is not prohibited.

b. The Greek word translated intercede means "to deal or transact with one person in reference to another, either making a statement 'concerning' him upon which certain proceedings ought to follow, or asking something 'for' or 'against' him" (Milligan, p. 151).

2. It is for us.

Every passage speaking specifically of Christ's intercession in heaven indicates that it is on behalf of—for the benefit of—the believer ("for us . . . for them ... for our sins").

3. It is continuous.

"He ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb. 7:25).

4. It is based upon His own perfect, once-for-all sacrifice at Calvary.

a. Study Hebrews 9 and 10, noting especially 9:24-28 and 10:10-14.

b. This means, among many other wonderful things, that Christ's petitions on behalf of His people have a basis of absolute justice (I John 1:9).

c. His atonement paid for all our sin, and we are seen as perfectly justified in Him.

C. Our Lord's intercession IN PARTICULAR.

There are two classes of passages from which we may derive information concerning the particular nature of our Lord's intercession. (1) The statements in Romans, Hebrews and I John, and (2) the inferences from His prayers recorded in the Gospels. While not as much is revealed as we might like, the following ideas are suggestive. His intercession secures:

1. Eternal salvation.

Actually, this might be considered a result of Christ's intercession, but because of the clear statement of Romans 8:34 and Hebrews 7:25, it is included here.

2. Forgiveness for sins committed in our daily walk (I John 1:9; 2:1).

3. Persistence in faith (Luke 22:32).

Faith is the basic principle of the believer's life (II Cor. 5:7; Heb. 11:6, etc.). It is not surprising, therefore, that our Lord's intercession would include this particular aspect of our character. Peter's faith did not fail, though his courage did.

4. Preservation through times of satanic attack, especially when we do not know that those attacks are coming. Note Peter's ignorance of what lay ahead for him and his consequent self-confidence (Luke 22:31-34; John 17:15).

5. Protection as we move through a dangerous world (John 17:11).

See Paul's request for himself in II Thessalonians 3:1,2.

6. Purity as we move through a very dirty world (John 17:17).

This passage needs to be considered also from the standpoint of positional sanc-tification. God's people are set apart and are distinct because of their possession of, and obedience to, the truth of God.

7. Sympathetic help in facing the temptations and tests of life (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:15, 16).

8. Spiritual unity (John 17:21).

9. Ultimate glorification (John 17:24).

It is significant to note that Jesus prayed for many of these things while here on earth. May it not be that He continues His intercession for us along these same lines in heaven today?

D. The IMPLICATIONS of Christ's intercession.

1. We are assured that eternal salvation is ours.

2. We are encouraged to believe that we can cope with any kind of circumstance in life and labors.

3. We are given a cause for real and abiding joy throughout all of life (John 17:13; see also 15:11; 16:24).

Not only does the receiving of answers to our own prayers produce joy, but the contemplation of Christ's perfect intercession for us should enhance that joy.

4. We find an example for our own intercession for others.

a. We must have a ministry of intercession. If we do not, we certainly cannot claim to be followers of Christ,

b. In Christ's intercession we find some matters about which we should be praying on behalf of others, including: protection, purity, growth in faith, joy, etc. His concerns for others should be our concerns.

8. Praying with Faith

"But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"(Heb. H:6).

"And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:22-24; see also Matt. 17:20; Luke 17:6).

A. What is faith?

1. Natural faith—the basis of community life. We trust the doctor, the merchant, the bus driver, the airplane pilot, etc.

2. Spiritual faith—the biblical definition. "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1,NIV).

B. Biblical examples.

1. By faith, Abraham obeyed God and went to the place to which he was called, even though he did not know where it was. He also, when promised a son in his old age, believed God's remarkable promise (Rom. 4:18-22).

2. By faith, the three Hebrew young men trusted God, even when they did not know exactly what God was going to do (Dan. 3:16-18).

3. When Jesus healed the son of the nobleman, He merely told the man that his son was healed, and the man "took Jesus at his word and departed" (John 4:50, NIV).

4. When Paul received a reassuring word from God, he announced to his companions on the stricken ship, "Keep up your courage, men, for I have faith in God that it will happen just as he told me" (Acts 27:25, NIV).

C. A working definition of faith.

1. Faith is an active confidence in God that displays itself in trusting His promises and acting upon His revealed principles.

2. Faith need not be large, but it must be genuine. This is the "mustard seed" principle (see Mark 10:23-27; Luke 17:6).

3. Faith will believe that God can perform the impossible. This is behind the "mountain moving" teaching of Jesus in Mark 11:23.

D. The basis for praying in faith.

1. Negative aspects.

a. It is not the evidence of our circumstances (see I Kings 18:41-45). Six times the servant reported no sign of rain.

b. Faith does not require a sign to shore it up (see Judg. 6:36-40). God made gracious concession to Gideon's feeble faith.

c. Feelings and emotional reactions are not an adequate basis for praying faith.

2. Positive aspects.

a. Praying in faith finds its warrant in the promises of the Word of God.

(1) The vital principle of prayer is to turn the promises of God into practice through prayer.

(a) "We must turn God's promises into prayer, and then they shall be turned into performance" (Matthew Henry).

(b) "Though the Bible be crowded with golden promises from cover to cover, yet will they be inoperative until we turn them into prayer . . . . God's promises are given, not to restrain, but to incite to prayer" (F. B. Meyer).

(2) Elijah prayed God's promises into performance. (Compare I Kings 17:1 with James 5:17; then see Deut. 11:16,17; then compare I Kings 18:1 with 18:41, 42.)

(3) The promises made to Israel— promises of sure fulfillment—are to be prayed into performance. See

Ezekiel 36 (esp. v. 36); then note v. 37 ("I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel").

(4) When Daniel realized that it was time for God to fulfill His promise to restore Israel to her land, he went to prayer, asking God to do what He had already promised that He would do (Dan. 9:1-3; see also Jer. 29:10-14).

b. The whole biblical revelation ends with a promise and a prayer (Rev. 22:20). This last word of Jesus to His people "is the promise of promises— the crown and consummation of all promise—the coronation of all evangelic hopes—the sum of all prophecy and prayer" (Seiss, p. 527).

c. Praying in faith does not require external confirmation, but believes God in spite of appearances.

(1) Elijah's prayer for rain was a triumph of faith in spite of the repeated report from his servant that the sky remained cloudless (I Kings 18:41-45).

(2) In spite of the fact that Abraham's wife was far past the age of childbearing, he believed the promise of God that he would have a son (Rom. 4:18-21). d. Praying in faith is sometimes prompted by the Holy Spirit's working in the heart concerning a matter not specifically spoken of in the Scriptures. There are many examples of this in Christian history. One of the most prominent is the prayer experience of George Mueller of Bristol, England, who, in the care of his large orphanage, was often led to pray with real faith for the provision of needs.

E. How to pray in faith.

1. Fill the mind and heart with the Word of God in order to know His promises, such as those found in Philippians 4:19, Isaiah 40:31, James 4:8, and John 14:27.

2. Keep your life right so that God can pour into your heart the Spirit of prayer and supplication. "For the eyes of the Lord move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His" (II Chron. 16:9, NASB).

3. Keep a careful list of the promises of God that you are praying will be turned into practice in your own life.

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit" (Eph. 6:18).

9. Praying in the Spirit

"The Spirit also helps our weakness . . . intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:26, NASB).

A. What is praying "in the Spirit"?

1. Two possibilities that are not mutually exclusive.

a. Recognize the Spirit as the sphere surrounding our life. "If we live by [or in] the Spirit, let us also walk by [or in] the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25, NASB). The Holy Spirit is the sphere of existence of the believer. We are surrounded by His presence and power.

b. We pray by means of, and in dependence on, the Spirit's help. "So long as He is ungrieved, He is able to guide us in our petitions and create in us the faith that claims the answer. Our prayers will then be in substance the same as the intercessions of the Spirit within" (Sanders, p. 64).

2. Since prayer is represented in Scripture as an essential factor for progress in the Christian life, it is not surprising to find that the Spirit of God is deeply involved in this activity.

B. Some observations concerning prayer "in the Spirit."

1. Prayer that is inspired and directed by the Spirit will always be prayer according to the will of God, because the Spirit knows perfectly what that will is (Rom. 8:27).

2. Prayer that is inspired and directed by the Spirit will always result in an answer that will glorify Christ (John 16:14) and, therefore, will be prayer that pleases the Father.

3. Prayer in the Spirit will always be in harmony with the written Word of God that He inspired. He will never move us to pray for something not sanctioned by Scripture.

4. The Spirit's guidance in prayer complements Christ's advocacy in heaven (John 14:16; I John 2:1).

C. How does the Spirit help us in prayer?

1. He introduces us into the presence of the Father (Eph. 2:18).

2. He overcomes our reluctance, working in us the desire to pray (Zech. 12:10).

3. He imparts a sense of sonship and acceptance that creates freedom and confidence in the presence of God (Gal. 4:6, Rom. 8:15).

4. He helps us in the ignorance of our minds and infirmities of our bodies so that we can pray as we ought (Rom. 8:26).

5. He takes our imperfect prayers and puts them in a form acceptable to our Heavenly Father (Rom. 8:27).

6. He lays special burdens of prayer on the believer who is walking in fellowship with Him (see Dan. 9:2, 3).

10. Prayer and Fasting

Two extreme views are held concerning the practice of fasting: (1) that it is a meritorious activity that should be practiced by all Christians for the purpose of gaining favor with God (an example would be the observance of Lent), and (2) that it is not a part of the practice of the church and has no value at all.

The truth surely lies somewhere between these two extremes.

A. Some general observations on fasting.

1. Prayer and fasting are linked together in several New Testament passages.

a. Consider Luke 2:37; Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23.

b. Additional passages appear in the KJV (including Matt. 17:21; Mark 9:29; I Cor. 7:5), but these are probably the additions of an eager medieval copyist.

2. The verb "to fast" (Gr., *nesteuo*) means to abstain from eating.

3. Neither Jesus nor the apostles issued any command that believers should fast. However, it is clear that Jesus did not disapprove of the practice and that the apostles engaged in it.

4. The teaching of Jesus on the subject is largely corrective and places the emphasis upon the motive behind the fasting. As in all things, He demands sincerity, not formality.

5. The frequent practice of fasting in both the Old Testament and the New Testament would seem to indicate that there is some value in the practice. For the Christian, that value always lies in the connection of fasting with prayer.

B. The spirit and attitude behind any genuine, effective fasting.

1. Fasting will be done humbly—without display, without hypocrisy.

2. Fasting is to detach one's self from anything that could keep us from praying.

3. Fasting is a reflection of the determination to abstain from lesser blessings in order to enjoy the greater—a time of full, unbroken fellowship with God.

4. Fasting means that we will engage in prayer with unusual persistence.

5. Fasting is a deliberate clearing of the way for prayer—getting rid, for a time, of all weights and encumbrances (see Heb. 12:1).

6. Fasting is a very proper expression of mourning (see II Sam. 1:12; Jonah 3:5-7).

7. Fasting is "a practical acknowledgment of the supremacy of the spiritual" (J. O. Sanders). The discipline of fasting helps keep the body in its place (see Matt. 4:3, 4; I Cor. 9:27).

C. The teaching of Jesus on fasting.

1. Matthew 6:16-18.

a. Jesus did not criticize the Pharisees for fasting but for the manner in which they did it. They were making a public display of it.

b. It may be seen from this passage that:

(1) Fasting is a private matter between a man and his God.

(2) If one is going to fast, his motive must be right.

(3) If we are going to fast, let us fast in secret and live normally before our fellowmen.

2. Matthew 9:14,15; Mark 2:18-20; Luke 5:33-35. a. Fasting was a practice of John's disciples and the Pharisees, b. Jesus' answer to the question would indicate that:

(1) There are times appropriate for rejoicing and for mourning.

(2) During this age, when Christ is absent, fasting is appropriate.

(3) Fasting is sometimes (but not always) associated with mourning.

D. Fasting in the Book of Acts.

1. Acts 9:9-11.

a. Saul, at the time of his conversion.

b. Was he fasting as a token of genuine, deep repentance? c. Was he praying for deliverance from his blindness?

2. Acts 13:2, 3.

a. Fasting is connected with worship (see the NIV rendering).

b. Fasting is connected with the prayer for Barnabas and Saul by which they were committed to the missionary enterprise.

3. Acts 14:23.

Prayer with fasting was part of the appointment of elders in the churches.

E. The value of prayer and fasting.

We must insist that fasting is only an aid and accompaniment of prayer. Many have testified concerning the mental, spiritual and physical benefits of fasting as such (spiritual sensitivities are sharpened, etc.), but this has no warrant in Scripture.

We are limited in our conclusions to examples from Scripture and history. There is neither promise nor command concerning fasting in the Bible. The practice or non-practice of it is a matter of complete liberty.

1. Help in time of trouble often comes from prayer and fasting (see Josh. 7:6; Judg. 20:26; Ezra 8:21-23; Esther 4:15,16).

2. Finding out what is wrong in our spiritual life—what seems to be displeasing to God— may come as a result of prayer and fasting. Joshua and the elders of Israel did not know why God had allowed them to be defeated at Ai (Josh. 7).

3. Wisdom from God may be received after prayer and fasting (Acts 13:1-3).

4. Unusual Holy Spirit power comes in answer to prayer and fasting (see Luke 5:35; Acts 1:14; 9:8-19).

F. Conclusions regarding prayer and fasting.

1. Fasting is not commanded as a necessary practice for a believer.

2. Jesus did not disapprove it in those who were practicing it, but He corrected its abuse.

3. The church in the Book of Acts practiced it on occasion, as at times of special need for wisdom, etc.

4. Saints since New Testament times have practiced it with profit.

a. The church of the first three centuries often observed two fast days per week (Schaff, II, pp. 377-380).

b. During the medieval period the monastics perverted the practice of fasting to a meritorious work and satisfaction to be rendered to God.

c. The list is endless of men and women mightily used of God who testify to the benefit of prayer and fasting, including: Martin Luther, George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, Henry Martyn, Andrew Bonar and Hudson Taylor. These testimonies cannot be ignored.

5. J. Oswald Sanders suggests that fasting after the New Testament pattern was the spontaneous outcome of the following:

a. The challenge of a special test or temptation,

b. A deep yearning for a closer walk with God.

c. A heavy burden for the spread of the Gospel in the regions beyond,

d. Spiritual travail for the upbuilding of the church,

e. The exigencies of a stubborn situation.

6. In the matter of "to fast or not to fast," let us be neither legalistic nor judgmental—but very sensitive to our own needs, the urgency of the hour and the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

11. United Prayer

The witness of Scripture is clear that there is great benefit when God's people pray together. When Christians join in united prayer God is pleased, power is displayed from heaven, answers are obtained, and Christians are strengthened and advanced in maturity.

A. United prayer in the Scriptures.

1. Acts 1:14.

The church was born in a setting of united prayer. Jesus had commanded His followers to tarry in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49); they obeyed Him and were joined together in prayer. In that atmosphere the church came into existence.

2. Acts 4:18-33.

The newborn church faced a time of testing. Christians were being threatened by the highest religious authority in the land. With a sense of weakness and with a desire to be obedient to their Lord, they joined together in prayer "with one accord" (v. 24). Their request was clear, their prayer was heard, and God answered in a striking way.

3. Acts 12:1-25.

Another crisis faced the church. James had been executed by Herod. Peter was arrested and faced the same fate. The church went to prayer for Peter. (What did the Christians pray for? Courage . . , deliverance . . . peace of heart?) God answered, Peter was delivered, the church was encouraged, the chief enemy of the church was removed, and the Word of God moved forward.

4. Matthew 18:19,20.

Jesus taught that where even two believers on earth agree (symphonize) concerning a matter, the Father in heaven will grant their request. The main matter in view here seems to be church discipline, but the "any thing that they shall ask" of verse 19 opens the door to wider concerns. 5. Romans 15:30.

In this sample passage may be seen Paul's concern that fellow believers pray in concert for him: "Strive together with me in your prayers to God for me."

B. Some guiding principles.

There are broad principles that point out clearly the reasonableness, the fitness and the importance of united prayer.

1. The BODY principle.

The church is the Body of Christ (see I Cor. 12). When a body is in a state of good health, all of its parts function harmoniously. So when the parts and members of the spiritual Body are functioning harmoniously with each other and with their Head, it may be expected that the Body will accomplish its intended purpose. United prayer is an evidence of this harmonious functioning.

2. The UNITY principle.

Apart from the figure of the body (and of the family), the Scripture declares forthrightly that there is to be unity in the church. That unity is established by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:13) but is to be guarded, kept and displayed by the members of the church (Eph. 4:3). Jesus prayed for such a display of unity (John 17:20-23). Any gathering for prayer by those who are "in one accord" demonstrates that oneness God delights to see and acknowledge. God is pleased with any real expression of oneness.

3. The FAMILY principle.

The church is the family of God. In any family it is right and proper for all the children to unitedly make a request of their father—and it can be expected that the united request will have a considerable impact upon the will and emotions of the parent. Using this as an analogy in the spiritual realm we are reminded that it is right, proper and necessary for the family of God, or a part of that family, to unitedly petition the heavenly Father for some desired request.

C. Some derived truths.

1. United prayer is pleasing to God. It displays recognition of some of the great principles of the church's life, including the BODY principle, the FAMILY principle and the UNITY principle.

2. In the early days of the church, God answered in striking ways the united prayers of believers and caused a few of the prayers/answers to be recorded for the instruction and encouragement of the church throughout this present age.

3. When Christians are gathered to pray, the gathering should be "in Jesus' name"—that is, they should be gathered to accomplish by prayer what Jesus would do if He were present in bodily form.

4. Powerful united prayer will have a clear-cut objective. In Acts 4 they prayed for boldness. In Acts 12 they prayed for Peter. Jesus declared in Matthew 18:19: "If two of you shall agree [be in symphony] on earth as touching any thing

5. Powerful united prayer can defeat the purpose of the satanic kingdom, which is arrayed against God, His people and His purpose.

a. Acts 4:25-28. They recognized the foreshadowing of the fulfillment of Psalm 2, when kings and rulers of the earth rise up in rebellion against God's appointed King.

b. Acts 12. The kingdom of Satan is represented by Herod, the soldiers, iron bars, chains, etc. In answer to united prayer, all of these facets of the satanic kingdom were overcome. Note that King Herod was removed (vv. 20-23). There is no reason to believe that the Christians asked for this. It was an answer "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think" (Eph. 3:20).

c. Ephesians 6:10-12. The church has powerful forces arrayed against it. These forces operate in the spiritual realm, using human instruments. Spiritual warfare must be carried on with spiritual weapons.

6. United prayer can produce advances in Christian character in the lives of those involved.

a. Acts 4:32, 33. Christians were united (selfless) in heart and soul.

b. Acts 12:11. Peter grew in faith. (There is a certain contagion to faith. When we see God work in response to the believing prayer of others, our own faith is strengthened.)

7. United prayer can result in progress in the proclaiming of the truth of God.

a. Acts 4:33. There was renewed power in witnessing.

b. Acts 12:24. "But the word of God grew and multiplied," and Barnabas and Saul were soon to be sent on their way by the church to spread the Word of God to new regions.

D. Some practical applications.

1. Every church should make united prayer a vital part of its ministry. No church can be said to be fulfilling its ministry to any degree if it is not laying hold of the power of God through prayer.

2. Every missionary should have a prayer support group with which he can keep in contact for prayer support.

3. Each pastor should seek to make his official body (deacons, elders, etc.) a powerful praying force. Men who are reluctant about prayer do not belong in places of leadership in the church.

4. Many family problems (rebellious children, husband-wife friction, impending divorce, etc.) could be solved if there was a small prayer group in the church whose members would regularly agree together and fervently pray about those matters.

12. Attitudes and Approaches in Prayer

As the believer enters his prayer experience day by day, there are certain attitudes that should be present. Some of these are covered under other headings. The following are suggestive of other matters that should be considered.

A. Sense of duty.

1. Duty is not the highest of motives, but it is a legitimate one and a good one. Jesus said that men ought always to pray (Luke 18:1).

2. We call Jesus "Lord." How can we call Him Lord and fail to do what He says (Luke 6:46)?

3. That which is done from a sense of duty (obedience) soon becomes delight.

B. A sense of privilege.

1. It is none other than Almighty God who invites us to pray (Jer. 33:3).

2. It is none other than Jesus Christ, the second person of the Triune God, who has made it possible for us to pray (John 14:6; Heb. 10:19, 20, etc.).

3. It is none other than the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Triune God, who has deigned to assist us in our praying (Rom. 8:26, 27).

4. Does not the opportunity extended to us unworthy sinners fill us with a sense of privilege as we approach the throne of grace?

C. Humility.

1. No one has the inherent right to enter into the presence of God and petition Him. That right was forfeited by sin and reclaimed for us at the great price of the death of Jesus Christ.

2. Correct views of our own depravity, the graces extended to us and the sinfulness of our hearts

(Jer. 17:9) will remove all arrogance and enable us to approach God boldly (Heb. 4:16), yet humbly (Luke 18:13).

D. Submission.

1. Prayer that pleases the Father is that which is offered to Him in the spirit of His own Son, "Yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42, NASB).

2. One of the subtle dangers of the prayer experience is to think that God isn't hearing us—or doesn't love us—because He does not answer our petition in just the way we had hoped and expected.

3. But God, for great and wise reasons, denied requests of Moses, Elijah, Paul, etc. In every case, His denial issued in greater blessing.

4. The logic of submission is simply God's wisdom. He knows me, the way ahead and the thing that is best. Therefore, I rest in Him (Phil. 4:6, 7).

E. Fervency.

1. Too much of our praying is perfunctory, even lackadaisical. It lacks real seriousness, genuine desire and fervent longing,

a. Elijah prayed earnestly (James 5:16, 17).

b. Moses prayed pleadingly (Ex. 32:11-13, 31, 32; 33:12-16).

c. Daniel prayed intensely (Dan. 9:17-19).

d. Paul prayed agonizingly (Rom. 15:30; Gal. 4:19).

e. Jesus prayed persistently (Matt. 26:39-44).

2. "The call to prayer means a call to work, not a summons to set going a machine which needs neither brain nor heart. It is a call to gather up all the forces of the soul, and to summon them to the intensest activity. It is indeed the highest exercise to which a man can be called" (Hastings, p. 209).

F. Definiteness.

1. When the blind man called to Jesus for mercy, Jesus replied, "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mark 10:51, NIV). And the blind man said to Him, "Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!" (v. 51, NASB).

2. Jesus knew the man's need, but He wanted to hear from his lips a distinct and specific expression of what his desire was.

3. Let us make our request specific and clear. Andrew Murray points out that our Lord wants us to make distinct expression of definite need for our own good (With Christ in the School of Prayer, pp. 74, 75).

a. Definite prayer teaches us to know our own needs better,

b. Definite prayer searches us and puts us to the test as to whether our desires are honest and real, such as we are ready to persevere in.

c. Definite prayer leads us to judge whether our desires are according to God's Word,

d. Definite prayer helps us to wait for the special answer and to note it when it comes.

13. Hindrances to Praying

Since prayer is the means by which power is called down into the life of the pray-er and of the one for whom he prays and since prayer is a great means by which God is glorified, Christ is honored and the work of the church is advanced, it is to be expected that Satan will do everything in his power to prevent the Christian from praying. There is a sense, therefore, in which everything that is mentioned below can be seen as emanating ultimately from Satan (see Chapter 15, "Conflict in Prayer").

A. Internal hindrances.

1. Unbelief.

a. Prayer may be entered into in a perfunctory manner without any real confidence that anything is to be accomplished by it.

b. But apart from faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6), and Scripture plainly declares that the one who does not pray in faith cannot expect anything from the Lord (James 1:5-7).

c. The antidote for unbelief.

(1) Continue to pray out of a sense of duty or "oughtness," regularly confessing our unbelief.

(2) Give a good portion of closet time to meditating in the Scriptures, including the Psalms, which are often grand expressions of faith, and the Gospels, which portray Christ as One who can be absolutely trusted.

(3) Read and collect accounts of answers to prayer.

2. Weariness (both physical and mental).

a. Our bodies and spirits are bound together in an indivisible "bundle of life." A weary body and/or an exhausted mind makes prayer very difficult.

b. Thus, like the apostles (Matt. 26:40), we will disappoint the Saviour—sleeping when we should be watching and fellowshipping with Him. Like Peter, we may well fall into sin because we have not girded ourselves for the temptations ahead (Matt. 26:41).

c. The antidote for weariness.

(1) Set a time for prayer when mind and body are most rested.

(2) Do not feel obligated to always kneel. Walking the floor will keep the body more alert.

3. Wandering thoughts.

a. It is not uncommon that we "come to ourselves" in the midst of an intended time of prayer only to discover that we haven't been praying at all but have been thinking about this and that, b. This also is disappointing to the Saviour— that we should fail to consciously enjoy His presence with us. c. The antidote for wandering thoughts.

(1) Pray aloud. It is necessary to focus the thoughts when they are being expressed verbally.

(2) Through concentration and meditation, endeavor to center the thoughts upon God and His truth before beginning to pray.

(3) Use the Scriptures, turning the promises and admonitions into prayer (II Cor. 10:4, 5).

(4) Use a carefully prepared prayer list.

B. External hindrances.

1. Busyness.

a. Most earnest Christians live busy lives. There will be many convenient ways to excuse our omitting prayer from our daily schedule.

b. One of the great delusions of Satan is to give the impression that activity is equivalent to spirituality. This is never true. We must "take time to be holy." Spiritual growth must be cultivated and nurtured. The busy life without prayer becomes sterile and powerless. The believer eventually becomes aware that he is "beating the air," accomplishing very little, and has no sense of real fellowship with the Father.

c. The antidote for busyness.

(1) Set a fixed time for closet prayer, allowing nothing to usurp that time.

(2) Consciously and deliberately seek to develop the spirit of prayer.

(a) Determine to spend one minute out of every waking hour of the day in prayer.

(b) Develop the habit of concentrating on God in the first waking moment of the day, and do the same upon retiring at night.

(c) Memorize and silently recite Scripture.

2. Interruptions.

a. Many of the things said under "busyness" also apply here.

b. S eek to establish a regular time for prayer when the probability of interruption is most limited.

14. Unanswered Prayer

One of the most perplexing problems to earnest Christians is why their prayers seemingly remain unanswered. Most of us will have to admit that we do not see answers to many of our prayers. Any wise Christian who faces this situation squarely will "take stock" of himself in order to find out the cause.

The following are some of the most common reasons why our prayers go unanswered.

1. We may be asking with wrong motives

(James 4:3).

2. Our faith may be resting on a wrong basis: faith in faith or faith in prayer rather than faith in God

(Mark 11:22).

3. We may be entertaining a secret sympathy with some sin

(Ps. 66:18). To "regard" means "to hold on " or "to cling" to.

4. Our confidence may be held back by a condemning heart

(I John 3:21, 22).

5. We may be entertaining a bitter or unforgiving spirit

(Mark 11:25, 26; Matt. 6:14, 15).

6. All may not be right in our marital relationship

(I Pet. 3:1-7).

7. God may be delaying the answer because He has something better for us than what we have asked

(John 11:1-6; Luke 5:1-16; 8:40-56).

8. God may be withholding what we ask in order to do special work in us

(II Cor. 12:7-10).

9. We may be praying a foolish prayer.

a. Elijah did so because he was discouraged (I Kings 19:1-18).

b. Jonah did so because he was out of tune with the heart and purpose of God (Jon. 4).

15. Conflict in Prayer

This is a somewhat mysterious subject, partially because we know so little about it. But Scripture reveals enough to make us aware that any earnest effort in prayer is going to be opposed every step of the way.

We sometimes speak of "prayer warriors," perhaps unthinkingly. The very expression implies conflict, battle, victory or defeat. It is certainly true that the Christian's prayer experience includes much delightful fellowship with God, the exercise of the high privilege of making our requests known unto God, and some soul-refreshing resting in God, but that is not the whole story.

Our opponent in prayer is Satan. He is the adversary of God and His people. He desires to destroy the work of God and the workers of God. He can roar like a lion and appear as an angel of light. He is the master deceiver and counterfeiter.

We should not be surprised, therefore, to discover that since prayer is the God-appointed means by which the Christian worker is strengthened, the work of the Lord is advanced, God is glorified, the church is enriched and Christ is honored, the Devil will do everything in his power to hinder the Christian in his praying.

Satan is to be resisted by the believer (James 4:7; I Pet. 5:9). The command to resist him implies that there is a struggle, an opponent, an adversary, a conflict.

A. Instruction concerning the conflict

(Eph. 6:10-20).

1. The call to the warfare: "Be strong in the Lord" (v. 10).

2. The combatants in the warfare: "the Lord" (v. 10) and "the devil" (v. 11).

a. Our strength is "in the Lord," not in our knowledge, wit, skill, etc.

b. The devil has many "wiles" (schemes, methods).

c. He is a brilliant, powerful and vicious foe.

3. The warning concerning the warfare: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood" (v. 12).

a. Ultimately, the Christian's warfare is not with other people. We must keep this always in the forefront of our thinking,

b. Ultimately, the Christian's warfare is with demonic spiritual forces, under the headship of Satan himself.

4. The equipment for the warfare (vv. 14-17).

5. The ultimate weapon in the warfare: PRAYER (vv. 18-20). a. Note that verses 14-20 constitute one continuous thought, b. The connection to be seen is: "Stand (v. 14). . . Praying" (v. 18).

B. Particulars given for the conflict

(Eph. 6:18, 19).

1. "Praying" (v. 18).

a. Prayer is the great expression of dependence,

b. The Christian's victory is always "in the Lord" (v. 10). c. The great necessity, therefore, is to keep in constant communication with Him.

2. "Praying always" (v. 18).

This is "to have the spirit in such unbroken communion with the Lord that all things, at all times, in all places, may be carried to Him in the upward look and inward attitude, even if no words are spoken.

It implies also the outstretched hand of complete dependence both on ordinary days and in sudden crises" (Ruth Paxson, p. 215).

3. "With all prayer" (v. 18).

The warfare involves all kinds of prayer, at all times, in all places, about all things.

4. "And supplication" (v. 18).

a. Prayers must be focused on some special need or danger of the one for whom we are praying,

b. The church praying for Peter in prison (Acts 12), for example.

5. "In the Spirit" (v. 18).

The Holy Spirit must direct, inspire and energize our prayers, for He alone knows all of Satan's wiles and how to deal with them.

6. "And watching thereunto" (v. 18).

a. The prayer warrior must be alert to any laziness or self-indulgence that would unfit him for prayer,

b. He needs, also, to be watchful of Satan's devices and for the evidence of God's working.

7. "With all perseverance" (v. 18).

a. He must not yield to discouragement because of delayed answers,

b. He must not be deflected from his prayer purpose by the pressure of other things.

8. "For all saints" (v. 18).

a. The church is the Body of Christ; therefore, when one member suffers, the Body suffers.

b. The whole Body of Christ suffers defeat to the degree that the individual members are defeated, and the victory of the church over the satanic foe is dependent upon the victory of every Christian.

c. Herein lies the responsibility of each saint for all saints, thus challenging the selfishness and exclusiveness that characterize so many of our pastors and other Christian leaders.

9. "And for me" (v. 19).

a. Paul was Christ's chief-of-staff of the human forces of that early church. He was the target, therefore, of Satan's most vicious attacks.

b. It is true in every age. If the enemy can destroy the leadership, he has won a great victory.

c. Therefore, we must pray earnestly for God's servants everywhere.

C. An example of the conflict

(Dan. 10:1-13).

1. Daniel prayed earnestly—with mourning and fasting—for a period of three weeks (vv. 1-3).

2. At the end of this period he saw a vision of a glorious heavenly messenger (vv. 4-10).

3. The explanation of the angel was that at the very beginning of Daniel's prayer (three weeks earlier), he had been sent with the answer but was hindered for 21 days by "the prince of the kingdom of Persia" (vv. 11-13).

4. This prince was obviously not the earthly prince of Persia but was one of the "rulers of the darkness of this world" mentioned in Eph. 6:12. He was the demonic, evil power behind the king of Persia, one of the emissaries of the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2).

5. So powerful was the demonic prince that he was able to hinder the heavenly messenger until help came from Michael, one of the chief angels.

6. Thus, satanic activity hindered the answer to Daniel's prayer for a period of three weeks.

D. Further glimpses of the conflict.

1. Romans 15:30. "Strive together with me in your prayers."

a. The word here describes intense effort, wrestling, agonizing,

b. Paul's request suggests that he sensed great opposition and hence the need of help in his prayers.

2. Colossians 4:12. "Epaphras . . . always labouring fervently [the same word] for you in prayers."

3. Jude9.

a. This verse illustrates the power of satanic opposition,

b. Even Michael the archangel did not have much success against him.

c. He called upon the Lord to rebuke him.

E. Conclusion and application.

1. The opposition that the Christian faces in his life and labors is ultimately satanic. Satan will use people, circumstances, etc., but he is always the real enemy. He hates God and His program, but since he cannot touch God, he vents his wrath against God's people.

2. Since prayer is one of God's ordained ways to get His work done, it follows that all prayer hurts Satan and frustrates his desires. He will, therefore, do everything in his power to keep the Christian from praying or to render his prayer ineffective. He uses his hosts of willing demonic agents in all of this (Eph. 6:12).

3. Here are some things Satan can do against the Christian.

a. He can afflict him physically (II Cor. 12:7; Luke 13:11, 16; Acts 10:38).

b. He can incite fierce opposition against the Christian and his message (Rev. 2:10).

c. He can create misunderstanding among Christians.

d. He can cause oppression of spirit, making the believer feel depressed, restless and aimless.

e. He can inject irrational fear into the believer's heart.

f. He can inject unclean or confused thoughts into the believer's mind.

g. He can cause fellow workers to misunderstand the truth and oppose the believer in his labor for Christ (Matt. 16:23).

h. By deceit and counterfeit he is able to lead multitudes into doctrinal error (Gen. 3:13; II Cor. 11:3, 14,15).

i. He can raise opposition to the believer on the basis of genuine human affection (Matt. 16:23; Mark 3:20, 21, 31-35).

j. Since Satan is relentless and tireless in his efforts to hinder and destroy the work of God, the list is endless.

4. Here are some things the Christian can do against Satan.

a. Identify the enemy (Eph. 6:12). The great success of satanic effort is seen in his causing many to deny his existence, ignore him, treat him lightly, etc.

b. Maintain in our hearts a determination to overcome Satan—to be sober and vigilant in our attitude toward him (I Pet. 5:8).

c. Realize that in spiritual warfare the weap-ons of the flesh are utterly useless (II Cor. 10:4).

d. Be persistent in prayer since we know that there may be a struggle in the very heavenlies to hinder the answer to our prayers.

e. Join with other Christians in their prayer warfare and call upon others to come to our aid (Rom. 15:30).

f. Offensively, the Christian must:

(1) Pray as our Lord directed us: "deliver us from the evil one" (Matt. 6:13, NIV).

(2) Confidently but humbly claim victory over Satan, having as our ground the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 12:11).

(3) When spiritual struggles are especially intense, may we not call upon the Lord Himself to rebuke Satan? (Jude 9).

16. The Morning Watch (How to Pray an Hour)

The perceptive Andrew Murray once made the following observation: "We all know the difference between a man whose profits are just enough to maintain his family and keep up his business, and another whose income enables him to extend the business and help others. There may be an earnest Christian life in which there is prayer enough to keep us from going back, and just maintain the position we have attained to, without much growth in spirituality or Christlikeness. The attitude is more defensive, seeking to ward off temptation, than aggressive, reaching out after higher attainment. If there is indeed to be a going from strength to strength, with some large experience of God's power to sanctify ourselves and bring down rich blessing on others, there must be more definite and persevering prayer."

In a similar vein Charles A. Cook has noted the following: "What a wide field there is to be occupied by prayer workers! Preaching must necessarily be limited, but who can put a limit to the possibilities and power of prayer? The prayer laborer can minister unto the ends of the earth. Missions, missionaries, the heathen, churches in heathen lands, rulers, governments, the nations, the world, the whole church of Christ, pastors, evangelists, all Christian workers, the coming of Christ, these and a myriad of other subjects may be prayed for."

But how can we develop such a prayer ministry? Can we really pray an hour each day with effectiveness? The following are suggestions in answer to these and other questions.

A. There must be a determination to have such a ministry.

The "I'll give it a try" attitude will not provide adequate motivation.

B. There must be a time established that will be kept as faithfully as mealtime, bedtime, etc.

C. The following simple time schedule may be followed.

With experience, this will be altered to meet the individual's need and desires.

1. 15 minutes—Reading of Scripture, carefully selecting passages that will be conducive to meditation, mind preparation and giving a sense of the presence of God.

2. 10 minutes—A season of confession, thanksgiving and worship. The use of good hymns may be helpful here, but make the words your own.

3. 15 minutes—Read from another book (devotional or spiritual biography),

a. My Utmost for His Highest by Oswald Chambers,

b. Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret by Mrs. Hudson Taylor.

c. The essays of A. W. Tozer, especially The Knowledge of the Holy.

d. The essays of F. W. Boreham.

e. Knowing God by J. I. Packer,

f. The Hidden Life of Prayer by D. M. Mclntyre.

g. Effectual Fervent Prayer by Gordon Watt.

4. 20 minutes—Season of petition and intercessory prayer,

a. Use your prayer list here,

b. Do whatever is necessary to really talk with God: pray aloud, walk the floor, etc.

c. Review the coming day's activities that you know about and commit them to God.

d. Ask for grace, wisdom, etc., for the unexpected.

e. Ask for God to use your life in touching someone else's life that day.

17. How to Observe a Day of Prayer and Fasting

It is good for a pastor to call his church together for a day of prayer and fasting. The frequency of doing this will be determined by the situation and condition of the church. My own experience has been that to attempt this once a month renders the whole activity commonplace. This ought not to be, but the fact remains. Such a time should be observed when there are special needs or occasions before the church: prior to elections, special evangelistic efforts, the missionary conference, etc. When specially pressing problems are facing the congregation, a day of prayer will elicit a better-than-aver age response.

The following suggestions have to do with a Sunday set aside for special prayer. There needs to be advance notice and exhortation so that folks can plan for the day. The following material placed in the church bulletin a week or two in advance can be helpful. The question is, "How do I go about observing a day of prayer and fasting?"

A. Get to bed early Saturday night.

B. Rise one-half hour earlier than usual on Sunday for Bible reading and prayer.

C. Select a book of the Bible (e.g. Philippians, Ephesians, I Peter, etc.) to read and ponder throughout the day.

D. Keep pencil and paper at hand to jot down thoughts received from your meditation.

E. Put prayer lists in order and pray systematically.

F. Have a season early in the day for confession and praise.

G. Use the time normally spent in eating breakfast and lunch for prayer.

H. After the church service meet with fellow believers for a time of protracted prayer.

1. The prayer time will be planned by the pastor and others so that there will be seasons of prayer for particular matters: the unsaved, missionaries, church needs, etc.

2. The great value of such a time is that those praying are not bound by the clock (as on Wednesday night!).

I. Abstain from the usual Sunday pleasures of riding, visiting, television, etc., and spend this time in soul cultivation, such as Bible study or reading some good devotional book.

J. Spend the day so that at its conclusion you can feel it was indeed THE LORD'S DAY.

18. The Intercessory Missionary

The following (Chapters 18 and 19) is the substance of a tract written many years ago by Mr. Alfred E. Street, who went as a missionary to the island of Hainan, off the coast of China, south of Canton, in 1892. Mr. Street gave his life to that work, both while on the field and when at home in America. He went to be with the Lord on January 10, 1922, at the age of 61 years, and was laid to rest in Bubbling Brook Cemetery, Shanghai, China, to await the sound of "the last trump" (I Cor. 15:52). The message is as pertinent today as the day it was written.

"And he [Jehovah] . .. wondered that there was no intercessor" (Isa. 59:16).

In Luke 10:2 Christ did not command us to pray the Lord of the harvest that He send forth missionaries, but "laborers." The difference is intentional, for there are others just as necessary as missionaries. "Missionary" means "one sent" and is the Latin form of the Greek "apostle."

Those harvest hands who directly teach the souls of men and save them can be divided generally into (1) native workers, upon whom in all countries the burden of evangelization rests; (2) missionaries, who are no longer needed when the natives have learned all they can teach (some centuries ago they finished their work among the English); and (3) intercessors, who give their time and strength to the distinct work of definite intercessory prayer.

If comparison is possible among things that are necessary, the intercessor is most important, because he is working at the very root and foundation of all harvest success. So far as man is responsible, his faithfulness determines the success of all others.

Definition.

An intercessory foreign missionary is a "laborer" who cannot go in person to the foreign field. He sets himself apart to pray for the definite details of the foreign missionary work. He alone is entitled to the name, who enters upon an engagement to work for definite fields. His engagement is as real as an appointment by a foreign mission board. His striking peculiarities are that he is working in the realm of "the heavenlies" instead of among visible men and that there are no restrictions upon the number who can be intercessors or to the places of their residence or the variety, sweep and completeness of the results accomplished.

Necessity for intercessory foreign missionaries.

That mission field that has the largest number of missionaries (faithful intercessors), whose names are not in the published lists, will always be the most successfully harvested. This is so for the following reasons:

1. Because of the nature of missionary activity.

Ephesians 6:10-20 reveals the facts clearly, concisely and completely, showing that we are not primarily overcoming the prejudices and superstitions of men but "principalities, powers, world rulers of the darkness, spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies"; these are various grades of rulers, organized into invisible kingdoms of darkness. In Daniel 10, some of these principalities are mentioned by name: "Prince of Greece," "Prince of Persia," "Kings of Persia," etc., while Christ calls the head of all these kingdoms the "Prince of this world." Other forces are revealed in the "horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" and the "twelve legions of angels" mentioned by Jesus. Thus, revelation shows missionary activity to be a spiritual war between the forces of Christ and those of Satan, not man trying to reform and civilize man. This war is waged for the possession of living men and through the medium of living men. Christ seeks men to be "members of his body," while Satan "enters" the hearts of men so that each works out his purposes through the men who submit to him. It follows that men must go in person, as Jesus came to the world in person, to do the work made possible by prayer.

2. Because prayer based on God's Word is the only weapon man can use to touch the invisible foe.

We can reach a Chinese by speaking face to face with him, but we can strike the spiritual Prince of China only by way of the place "above where Christ is" ever living to make intercession. An inspection of Ephesians

6 shows that the end of putting on the armor of God is prayer for all saints, but especially for Paul who represents his missionary successors. This armor is not for selfish protection but to enable us to "stand," and like Moses, Aaron and Hur, by supplication to give victory to those fighting Amalek (Ex. 17:8-16). Jesus did not call upon the 12 legions of angels but upon His disciples—that they should watch with Him in prayer while He fought the invisible foe. In this He has shown the way for all who "fight the fight of faith." Even now, it is by intercession that He continues the war.

3. Because the missionary on the field cannot do his work alone.

When the intercessor's hands fall, Amalek prevails on the mission field today. The enemy is strong. Jesus refused to bow down to Satan, but the heathen bow and worship; therefore, the blackness of darkness broods over those lands, a stifling, choking power of death. There a Christian is like a diver at the bottom of the sea.

In Christian countries, prayer is continually offered for the pastor and for every detail of the work of the church; special meetings are held to pray for a revival. In open-air meetings, while one is speaking, others are praying. Exactly in the same way, one or two missionaries alone among thousands or millions need other people to pray definitely while they work or speak. Only, the need is more urgent; as the bottom of the sea is more dangerous than the air, so there are more deaths "on the firing line" than in the quiet of the home.

The Body of Christ does not consist of each one of us individually but of all together, and if a missionary is left without sufficient aid in prayer, he suffers, limps and stumbles. Some have fallen away. He may succeed in fighting his way to the very presence of God and there receive blessings unspeakable, but meanwhile the heathen perish.

What can be done by intercessory missionaries?

1. A host of intercessors can be speedily enlisted for this war.

2. Enough missionaries and money can be found to readily accomplish our task.

3. Suitable men can be sent as missionaries, and the unsuitable can be prevented from making the mistake of going. Such mistakes have, in the past, cost many lives and thousands of dollars. They can be prevented by the Lord of the harvest only when He is asked to do so. Even Christ Himself prayed all night before He chose the first 12 missionaries. (It is a significant fact that there is no distinct command for man to send forth missionaries. That work was done by Christ Himself and then by His Spirit when He chose Paul and Barnabas. When they tried to choose fellow workers, they quarreled over the choice. The command is to pray.)

4. Many urgent questions of general missionary policy can be solved through much prayer.

5. Individual heathen can be prayed for by name and thus saved.

6. A native ministry can be raised up and maintained.

7. Revivals can continually spring up on the foreign fields.

8. Fresh fillings of the Holy Spirit can be given to overburdened missionaries.

9. The health and strength of missionaries can be maintained under the severe strain of their physical and social surroundings.

10. Lonely missionaries, those without many friends, can be cheered and helped until their usefulness is many times multiplied.

Experience has repeatedly shown that the believing prayer of one humble intercessor at home can bring about a revival on the foreign field and save thousands. The experience of one missionary was that, as far as man can see results, he was able to do more for the heathen toiling as an intercessor in America than while he was among the heathen without intercessors pleading for him.

19. How to Do the Work of an Intercessory Missionary

General procedure.

1. Decide deliberately that this intercession is to be a regular binding duty.

2. Select fixed days, hours, times and make them take precedence, as far as possible, over all other engagements.

3. Begin humbly, letting experience enlarge and guide.

4. Wait on the Lord of the harvest for directions as to what part of the field you are to belong to.

5. Learn the names of all missionaries in your field and pray for them by name.

6. Do not pity the missionary or condole with him, but give him your sympathetic help.

7. Write to the missionaries you are praying for, asking pointedly what their difficulties and needs are. Tell them you do not want something bright and newsy but something dark and discouraging and that when they are worn out, you want them to drop you a postcard telling you so that you can pray them strong again.

8. Pray for every need or condition that you can learn about. This article is only suggestive.

9. Form the habit of letting God impress upon you the things for which to pray. He will do it.

10. Not many words are needed, but much time must be spent in "waiting" upon Him, the very silence calling for His will to be done. Silence enables one to draw very near to God. "We know not how to pray as we ought," and must let "the Spirit himself make intercession."

11. Study and practice the art of praying until you are expert in it. The Bible furnishes its laws and examples, which can be worked out by patient practice only, just like any other art.

Warnings

1. Some may be tempted to cherish a subtle, hidden feeling that by doing this work they are conferring a favor on someone by helping. Not at all; it is the other way. The unspeakable favor is granted you of sharing the burden of intercession daily carried by the risen Man, Christ Jesus, in heaven.

2. A newly arrived missionary generally cannot vote for the first year, as so much has to be learned before he can do so intelligently. In the same way, one beginning as an intercessory missionary needs to consider himself as a beginner with much to learn.

3. Many, many times you will be tempted to give it all up as useless, for every possible form of deception will be among Satan's "wiles" to stop your intercession; if he can stop each one, his victory is assured, and there are alarmingly few intercessors.

4. Be ready patiently to toil on without apparent results; time is required for them to show. Many a laborer has worked for years without seeing the results that overjoyed his successors; cannot you do the same?

5. Woe be to anyone who tries to become an intercessory missionary while the Lord is calling him to go in person. In Matthew 7:23, Christ calls such "ye that work iniquity" (or lawlessness), for although they had been eminently successful workers, what they did was not "the will" of God for them.

General truths.

1. Indirect work.

Every Christian should do some work as an intercessory missionary, but there are some at home whom the Lord calls to give their daily toil for the salvation of the nations. Many are needed who, by teaching, writing and exhorting, shall arouse Christians to a sense of their responsibility for the death of those who perish, not because they are sinners but because the salvation prepared for them by Christ has never been

offered to them by men. In the work here suggested, house-to-house visitation among church members has proved most effective in arousing them to their privileges in the foreign fields. A caution is here needed, for such work is only indirect, and most jealous, prayerful care is needed to prevent it from displacing the direct work of intercession. Any work that is visible so appeals to our pride that it is more attractive than is the lonely toil of intercession.

2. Rejections.

It is generally considered that God has not called one to the foreign work if age, health, family relations, rejection by a mission board or other outward circumstances prevent him from going abroad. Such circumstances have no bearing whatever on the question as to whether the Lord wants you to work directly for the salvation of the heathen, God is waiting for you to take your place in THE VITAL, DIFFICULT AND BLESSED WORK OF JOINING Christ in interceding before Him. It is not evidence of obedience to drift quietly along at ease, letting the faraway, unseen multitudes perish for the lack of your prayers. Some laborers must not go to the mission field.

3. Substitutes.

When a draft is made for war service, only a limited number of men are called out, and a "substitute" has to be one of those not drafted in his own name. But in this spiritual war, every citizen of heaven is drafted, and no substitutes are possible because there are none left undrafted. Victory is impossible unless those at home meet and rout the invisible foe. It is unjust to send a man into the deadly blackness of heathenism without giving your life in intercession for him while he gives his life for the heathen. We must "lay down our lives for the brethren" (I John 3:16).

4. Candidates.

Beware of ever urging anyone to go as a missionary. The Holy Spirit can only do that with safety. We should urge that one to set his will "as flint" that he is going to "do the will of my Father in heaven" and that he then pray, "Lord, send forth laborers." Then if the Lord really wants him in foreign fields, it is only a matter of time before it will be made so plain that there is no room for doubt.

5. Rewards.

There is a peculiar supplementary reward given for all missionary work. It is in addition to the honors of faithful labor and is determined not by what is done but by what is "left." For every comfort or friend that you leave in order to do this work, you will receive 100-fold (10,000 per cent) of the comfort, rest and satisfaction that they could afford. This is indescribably true of both missionary and intercessor and is the kind of "joy set before him" that enabled Jesus to "endure." The missionary leaves by taking ship or plane; the intercessor leaves by shutting the door of his closet. Attendance at church meetings and conventions becomes a selfish indulgence of religious feelings when it leads to the neglect of the hard work God wants you to do. Men are dying in agony while you are enjoying a "beautiful" service and while God is calling you to forget your very existence in watching and praying with groaning that cannot be uttered.

The unspeakable riches in Christ are discovered by the missionary, whether he is among the heathen preaching to them or in the homeland interceding for them. These things are not mere matters of intellectual theory, but they have been proved in experience. They should become your experience also, for they are following in the footsteps of Christ Jesus.

20. How to Prepare and Use a Prayer Notebook

A. Size.

1. This is optional, but not too small.

2. Something like a 5 1/2" x 8 1/2" allows room for writing notes, pasting in requests from prayer letters and saving valuable thoughts, quips, etc.

B. Organization.

1. Matters for which you pray regularly,

a. Your own needs.

b. Your own ministry.

c. Your church,

d. Other churches,

e. Unsaved and backslidden,

f. Friends with special problems,

g. Schools and colleges.

h. Pastors and Christian workers.

i. Missions and missionaries.

2. Additional items to be included.

a. Special matters for which you have been asked to pray,

b. A page for urgent matters for which you are praying every day.

c. Quotations, quips, poems, etc., that you have found helpful and want to save.

C. Use.

Use your notebook daily.

a. It will give system, consistency and continuance to your praying,

b. It will serve as a disciplinary tool,

c. It will simplify your prayer practice and ministry.

21. Conclusion: Why Pray?

There is little value in studying and reading about prayer if we do not pray. In fact, learning about prayer can be positively harmful because it increases our responsibility and intensifies our guilt if we fail to pray. Prayer is one of the highest privileges of the child of God, the most significant form of service that can be rendered to God and men, and it is the duty of every believer. Therefore, we must pray.

The following is a brief summary and conclusion of material that has been handled in one way or another in this book. We are simply providing a brief answer to the question: Why must we pray?

A. We must pray because prayer is a vital life sign of the Christian and ought to be natural to him.

1. The Scripture teaches that every true Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9) and that it is the indwelling Spirit who prompts prayer and establishes the sense of intimacy with the Father (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6).

2. If a professed Christian does not pray or has no particular desire to pray, there is good reason to doubt whether the new birth has ever taken place.

3. Praying is one of the means of making our calling and election sure (II Pet. 1:10).

B. We must pray because the Scripture assumes that the child of God will pray.

1. No argument is advanced in Scripture for the exercise of prayer, just as no argument is advanced for the existence of God.

2. How did Abraham know that he was to pray? (Gen. 18:23-33). At least as far as the scriptural record is concerned, no exhortation or instruction was given him about this when he was called from his ancestral home. Likewise, as soon as Paul was converted, he prayed (Acts 9:11).

3. Praying is an evidence of our relationship with the Father. An absence of prayer in the life throws a shadow of doubt upon that relationship.

C. We must pray because Jesus Christ our Lord commanded it

(Luke 18:1).

1. It is folly to call Him "Lord" and not do the things He has told us to do.

2. Praying is a matter of obedience to Christ.

D. We must pray because Jesus Christ our Lord taught us how

(Matt. 6:5-18; Luke 11:1-13).

1. We are without excuse for not knowing the basic elements of prayer, for Jesus Himself has given them to us.

2. To fail to pray is to ignore the teaching of Jesus.

E. We must pray because the Apostle Paul exhorted believers to pray

(Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:18; I Thess. 5:17), requested prayer for himself and his labors (II Thess. 3:1; Rom. 15:30-33; Eph. 6:19, 20) and practiced prayer on behalf of others (Rom. 1:9 and other similar passages).

1. Behind his exhortations is apostolic authority and example.

2. If the great apostle needed to pray and longed for others to be praying for him, how dare we think we can neglect the regular, earnest practice of prayer?

F. We must pray because prayer is God's ordained way of appropriating His own omnipotent resources and getting His work accomplished.

1. Scripture and history combine to tell us that the exercise of prayer is woven into the very fabric of God's method of operation for His church, His people and His world.

2. We cannot seriously claim to be interested in the work and program of God while we neglect the practice of prayer.

G. We must pray because prayer is the highest activity of service that the Christian can render.

1. Prayer can be engaged in by everyone: the young and the old, the healthy and the sick, the educated and the uneducated.

2. The effects and results of prayer are not limited to our immediate geographical surroundings.

3. Prayer is the one service that has assured results, because the result of prayer is nothing less than God in action.

4. If we expect to one day have the Lord's approval upon us as servants of His, we must enter into the ministry of prayer.

A Beginning Bibliography On PRAYER

Hundreds of books have been written on the subject of prayer. Many are still being written. The following is a small list of useful works, most of which are currently in print or can be obtained through used bookstores. No book about prayer must ever be allowed to take the place of the Bible. However, some of these works can guide the reader into a deeper understanding of what the Bible teaches about prayer and thus be of great benefit to him.

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